5: Balandier--1 E-5 (1946-1951) 1955 FH9 Fang FH9



# Part II. Chapter I

## Fang Society

### I. The Fang Country

114 Fang migrations toward the Gabon coast continued until the beginning of the twentieth century. This thrust continues, and the terror it inspired among the populations which were driven back soon attracted the attention of the first explorers and colonists. As early as 1856, Du Chaillu succumbed to the attraction of the Fang country, conjuring up this "apparently restless and enterprising race" which strives to "take possession of the whole coastline." He knew that the key trading positions of the interior were to be found there. In 1884, A. Fourneau, then making his first expedition, was astonished by the conquering vitality of the Fang. He describes them as "intelligent, with very well-developed commercial instincts, not yet having the vices of the coastal tribes; there is no doubt that before long they will cause all the aborigines to disappear by absorbing them." (1) During the entire period of

1. A. Fourneau, Au Vieux Congo, Notes de route [In Old Congo, Travel Notes], Editions du Comité de l'Afrique Française, 1932, pp. 41-42.

penetration, there was a kind of Fang mirage which tended to overestimate the importance of the group: according to the Marquis de Compiegne (about 1875), "an extreme density of population extending over a length of more than 400 kilometers"; according to Lesieur-Trilles (1900), a population "that must number several million"; and following his mission (1905-08), Captain Cottes, more precisely and affirmatively, puts the figure at "two or three million subjects." Actually, Europeans discovering the "interior" during the second half of the nineteenth century were surprised at a large migration toward the coast taking place under their eyes, along the Ogooué River in the opposite direction from

114 their own penetrating movement, and in a way coming to meet them.

101 [74] The Fang -- or Pahouin [Pahuin] -- occupy in an oblique direction, northeast to southwest, the upper part of Gabon, with the line of the Ogooué roughly forming their southern frontier. [161] They represent 127,000 inhabitants out of the 415,000 living in this territory. They are separated by the Cameroons frontier from a collection of related and particularly active peoples numbering more than 550,000 individuals. (1) They are divided by the

1. Cf. I. Dugast, Inventaire ethnique du Sud-Cameroun [Ethnical Inventory of the South Cameroons], I.F.A.N., Douala, 1949; or "Esquisse ethnologique pour servir à l'étude des principales tribus du Cameroun français... [Ethnological Sketch to Serve for the Study of the Principal Tribes of the French Cameroons]," Bulletin de la Société des Etudes Camérounaises, pp. 21-22, 1948.

frontiers of Spanish Guinea which, with an essentially Fang population (of nearly 100,000 individuals), isolates closely related groups. The hazards of colonial expansion have led to this partition into three "blocs" which were subject to different policies and condemned for a long time to ignorance of each other.

174 As to the arrival of the Fang in Gabon, we possess a few guide marks. According to our investigations in Woleu-N'Tem, the settlement goes back in this region eight or nine generations, which corresponds to the second half of the eighteenth century. According to E. Trezenem the Fang reached the Middle Ogooué at the beginning of the nineteenth century, (2) and their arrival at the estuary

2. E. Trezenem, "Notes ethnographiques sur les tribus Fan du Moyen-Ogooué [Ethnographic Notes on the Fang Tribes of the Middle Ogooué]," Journal de la Société des Africanistes, Vol. 6, f. I, 1936.

 must have been about 1850. (3) At the extreme end of their push

3. Rapport de la Commission d'Enquête Historique [Report of the Commission of Historical Inquiry], Libreville, 1949.

they reached the Setté-Cama region (near Sounga Lagoon) about 1890, (4) having been attracted by the trading stations that were

4. Archives de Gabon, rapports du Poste de Setté-Cama [Archives of Gabon, Reports of the Setté-Cama Post].

then there.

Originally, this great human movement occurred as a repercussion of the push of the victorious Peul (pl. Foulbé) into the Cameroons during the second half of the eighteenth century, (5)

5. Dugast, op. cit. and a general survey: "Essai sur le peuplement du Cameroun [Essay on the Population of the Cameroons]," Bulletin de la Société des Etudes Camerounaises, 21-22, 1948.

which forced the savanna population toward the forest zone. (6)

6. J. Despois, "Les genres de vie des populations de la forêt dans le Cameroun oriental [Types of Life of the Peoples of the Forest of the Eastern Cameroons], "Annales de Géographie, 297, 1946.

Most of the legends place the original country inhabited by the Fang very far to the northeast, a country which has an entirely different fauna from that of Gabon and which is peopled by white men using horses and skilled in iron work. (7) The arrival in the

7. Cf. Trezenem, op. cit.

174 forest region was symbolized by the legend told of the adzap (aža mbura) hole, referring to the obligation of all migrating groups [75] to pass through a hole dug in the adžap tree. Some of the educated Fang of the present day lay stress on the origins as reported by tradition, stressing the linguistic kinship between the Fang and Zandé dialects, (1) thus linking them to the civilizations of the

1. Kinship recognized by L. Homburger, Les Langues negro-africaines [Negro-African Languages], Paris, 1941, p. 35.

Upper Nile (and from there perhaps to Egypt), recalling the period when their ancestors were dressed "exactly like the Haoussa." (2)

2. In the modern version of the legend relating to the Ndong tribe (dispersed in Woleu-N'Tem).

This more or less explicit desire to give themselves "noble" origins corresponds to the more or less conscious desire of the Fang to force themselves on the forest populations of Gabon.

174 It is necessary to examine precisely the distribution of the
101 Fang throughout Gabon, and to recall their relations with the neighboring territories of the Cameroons and Spanish Guinea. The first classification attempted by early authors (3) was a division into

3. Captain Maignan, "Etudes sur le pays *Pahouin [Studies on the Pahouin Country]*" (dating from 1912), Bulletin de la Société des Recherches Congolaises, No. 14, 1931; and L. Mba, "Essai de droit coutumier pahouin [Essay on Pahouin Common Law]," Bulletin de la Société des Recherches Congolaises, June 25, 1938.

"lands": Betsi land (region north-northwest of the Estuary, overlapping Spanish Guinea); Maké land (region southwest of the

174 Estuary and Ogooué-Ivindo), Ntoum land (region north of Woleu-
101 N'Tem, overlapping the Cameroons). This simplified division does not take into account all the groups existing in Gabon, and does not indicate the overlappings between tribes which occur in each of the "lands" where there is constant migratory movement. Moreover, these names have barely survived. (4) They have been

4. Maignan, nearly fifty years ago, considered such a division fictitious.

obliterated by the general designation of "Fang" and by specific names (of tribe or clan, especially of family lines) representing local reality. One might think from certain statements of G. Tessmann and I. Dugast (5) that these names have mostly denoted

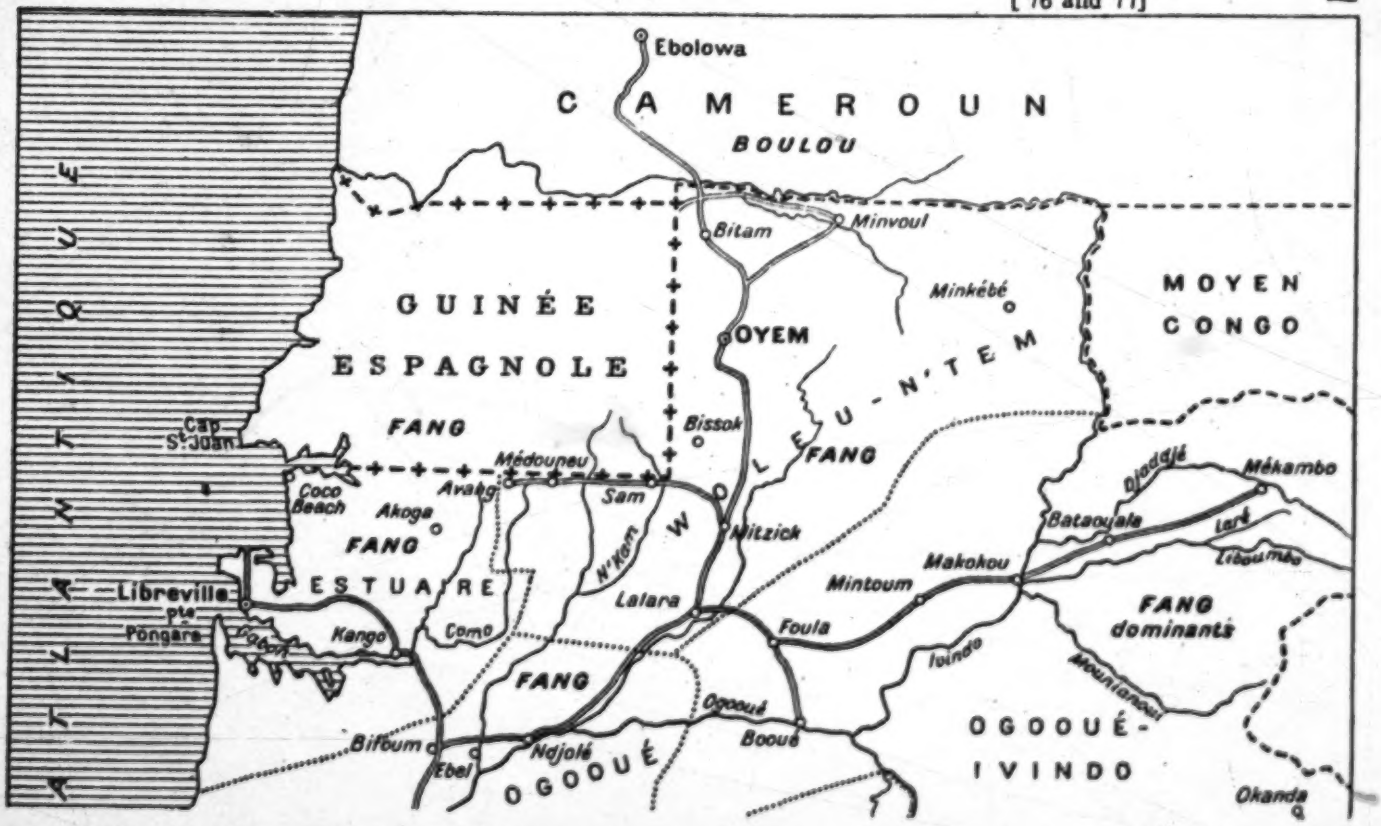
5. G. Tessmann, Die Pangwe [The Pangwe], 2 vols., Berlin, 1913; I. Dugast, Inventaire ethnique [Ethnical Inventory], chapter devoted to the Pahuin.

migratory groups that have dominated and assimilated various foreign groups and have thus acquired certain distinctive cultural characteristics.

Father Trilles asserts in a study published in 1912 that similar distinctions can be explained "from the point of view of dialects [78] and not from that of the customs or habits (which) are exactly the same." (1) But the dialectal variants themselves which appear

1. Father H. Trilles, Le Totémisme chez les Fan [Totemism among the Fang], Bibliothèque Anthropos, Vol. 1, fasc. 4, 1912, p. 12.

notably at the level of the names of clans (beginning with Esa, Esé, Esi, ... in the case of the Betsi; with Eba, Ebi ... in the case of the Make) have become blurred. At the time of the migrations several groups changed their clan name, having become




Legend: 1. Important centers. 2. Minor centers. 3. Roads. 4. Frontiers of regions.

GABON

5: Balandier--6 E-5 (1946-1951) 1955 FH9 Fang FH9

[76 and 77]

Legend: 1. Important centers. 2. Minor centers. 3. Roads. 4. Frontiers of regions.

5: Balandier--7 E-5 (1946-1951) 1955 FH19 Fang FH9

174 contaminated, so that the linguistic map is no longer indicative
101 of these ancient distributions.

From these facts two conclusions can definitely be drawn. The Fang population is not represented in Gabon by large homogeneous zones as in the Cameroons (where the Evondo country, the Boulou country, etc., can be clearly distinguished). The diverse Fang groups have become interdispersed and in the course of their almost incessant migrations since the second half of the eighteenth century have "digested" the foreign traits peculiar to the peoples they have met. And it is in the Lower Gabon, at the end of their journeyings that the Fang groups present a state of maximum confusion.

162 Administrative documents permit one to get a present-day
178 picture of the distribution of the Fang, a precise picture -- at least so it seems. The weakening (indeed the near disappearance) of distinctions between tribes and clans, the breaking up, the scattering, and half autonomy of the various groups, have led to the confusion of these two types of grouping and to placing them on the same plane. The administration cannot be blamed for this, for these two notions are no longer always precise in the minds of the present-day Fang. Let us discuss, first of all, the two zones by which this people reached Gabon, Woleu-N'Tem, and Ogooué-Ivindo.(2)

2. Cf. G. Balandier, Rapport préliminaire de la Mission d'information scientifique en Pays Fang [Preliminary Report of the Mission of Scientific Information on Fang Country], Brazzaville, 1949, étude mimiographiée [mimeographed study], pp. 5-10.

162 Region of the Woleu-N'Tem
361

This region presents a certain physical unity and a true ethnic unity. It is inhabited exclusively by Fang, a relatively preferable demographic situation. In 1949 there were over 71,000 inhabitants. It is surrounded only by either identical or related Fang groups; it

162 was explored and then occupied only at a late date. These conditions
361 delayed "contaminations" and permitted the maintenance of a certain unity. It now has a viable economic structure, thanks to its cacao production, which has finally created a true peasant state. [79]

## 1. Bitam and Minvoul Districts

These two districts are wedged between the Cameroons to the north, Spanish Guinea to the west, and a true "no man's land" to the east. The inhabitants, numbering 27,500, are the most active
[133 and prosperous elements (producing three quarters of the cacao
511] grown in the region) on the roads serving the Cameroons and the center of Oyem. They have built modernized villages "tied" to the cacao plantations. Their inhabitants belong to groupings found in the Cameroons and in Spanish Guinea, and some of the villagers have relatives in one or the other territory — like so many links favoring traffic in "merchandise" and ideas.

619 According to the census of 1936, the only detailed document,
615 27 clans or tribal fragments (clans that have maintained the tribal name) are now there. The most numerous clan is that of the Effak
[162] (Yénzòk tribe), (1) which has more than 15 percent of the population,

1. We give the tribal dependencies with all reservation. The near ignorance and "cheating" allied to the movement of clan regroupment render all certainty impossible, except when we have access to early documents, more particularly to a mention in the notes of Monsignor Martrou, which were kindly lent to us at the Libreville Mission.

followed by that of the Eba (Yémisèm tribe), which has 10 percent. The other groups may go down to a few tens of individuals. In this region are found the following tribes (ayog): Yénzòk, Yémvòg, Yémisèm. These are the most important in the Cameroons in the

G. Balandier--10 E-5 (1946-1951)1955 FH9 Fang FH9



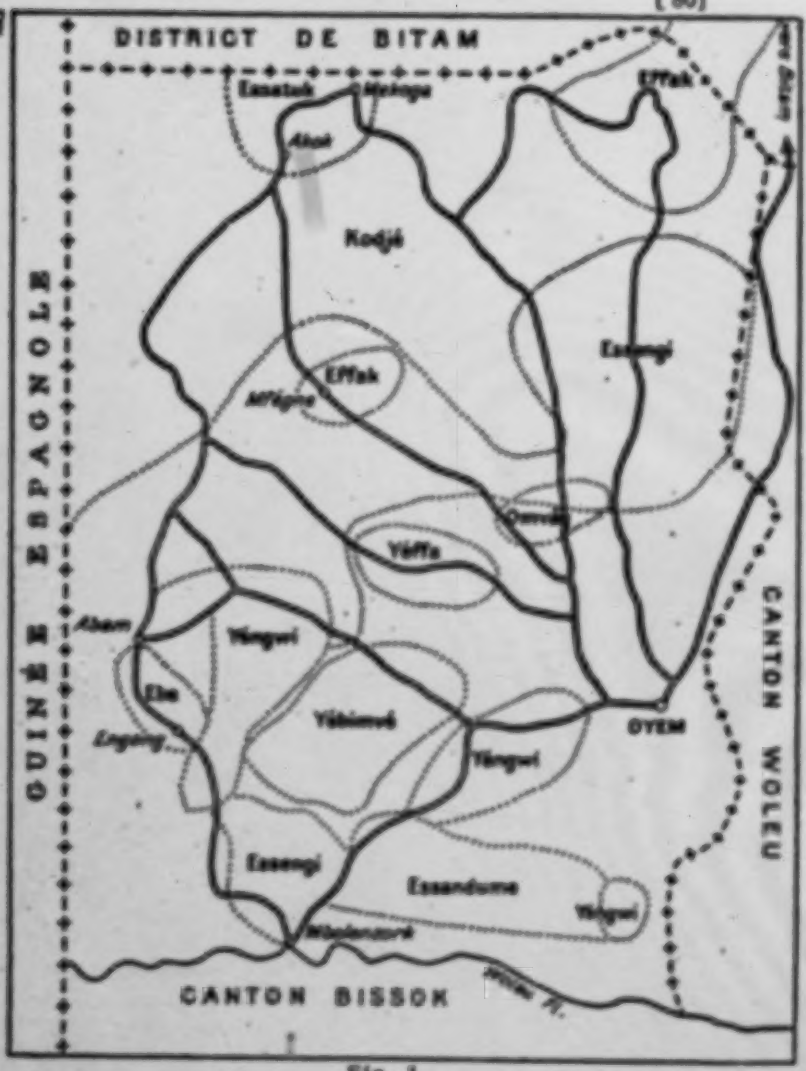



Fig. 1
Distribution of the "Aỳðg" in Kyé-Nyé Canton (District of Oyem).

619 Ebolowa and Sangmélima regions (2). The whole of Upper Woleu-
615

2. Documents relating to "ethnic groupings," Administrative Archives of Ebolowa.

N'Tem is oriented toward the Cameroons with which it has not only economic ties (it exports its cacao there and imports its goods) but also political ties (which explains why it served to relay the directives and their implementations that appeared in this territory).

## 2. Oyem District

162 This district, with 30,000 inhabitants, has a long frontier with
361 Spanish Guinea, and is crossed by the Woleu River, an important
439 means of access to this possession. The major part of the population (more than two thirds) is "stuck" to the frontier. This is understood because related groups exist on each side of the frontier; [80] [Fig. 1] [81] Guinea has always exerted an economic attraction (it is the center of trade and exchange of labor which is much in demand), and serves occasionally as a place of refuge. The villagers are fairly well-to-do because of the cacao cultivation (one fourth of the Woleu-N'Tem production) and because of the trade with Guinea (peaches, coffee, palmetto). This is shown particularly by an improvement in housing.

162 Kyé-Nyé Canton, a meeting place of two migratory streams
619 coming from the Lower Cameroons, contains by itself nearly
615 12,000 inhabitants who again are distributed by clans (Fig. 1). The dominant groupings are the Eɛ̀ngi (Yémvɔ̀g tribe), who account for more than 40 percent, the Kɔ̀jé for about 25 percent, and the Yéngwi for over 15 percent. In the canton of Woleu, the villages of the Ɔ̀kip tribe are dominant, accounting for 33 percent of the population. Then the Bɔ̀kwé (Nɛ̀ɛ̀g tribe) account for about 12 percent, and the Esamɛ̀kos (Yéngɔ̀l tribe) (1) for more than 10

1. Only confirmed by the notes of L. Marrou.

162 percent. Only the Kǒjə (more than 90 percent of the population)
619 and the Ǒkip form the Canton of Oyem. In Binok Canton, the
615 population is dominated by the Yéngwi and Yémisəm tribes, while Ellelem Canton is characterized by a sprinkling of groups: 17 clans or tribal fragments for 3,200 inhabitants, where the Bǒkwé (allied to the Nǒǒg tribe) alone assert themselves, although apparently numbering less than 25 percent.

361 Oyem District shows a great homogeneity, which is found
184 nowhere else in Fang country in Gabon. Its greater population density, its relative prosperity, the fact that it is centered on Oyem, an important administrative and market town, these facts explain the prestige it exerts on Fang villagers and its present-day political vitality.

### 3. Mitzic District

162 With 11,000 inhabitants belonging stricto sensu to the Fang
361 group (2) this district occupies a position which lends itself badly to

> 2. We designate as Fang the restricted whole which bears this sole name -- a migratory group according to us.

the stabilization of a population. It opens on three zones of attraction: the Ogooué, the coast, and Spanish Guinea. It has played the role of thoroughfare and was profoundly disturbed during the famine years (1922-23, 1925-26). It is barely beginning to modernize its economy by the installation of cacao plantations. [82] Besides being the least populated district, it has the worst demographic situation, the lowest birth rate, and the smallest child population. Although the people have settled along the roads (as is clearly shown when present-day maps are compared to early ones), the villages have remained unstable and very small, consisting of
361 composite groupings. An investigation of 50 villages spread along
615 the two roads show that they have in their midst 30 clans or tribal
619 fragments. At the time of the recent regrouping of clans, the most

361 active tribes were the Yémvɔ́g, the Yémɔ̂ɔ̂g, the Nɔ̂ɔ̂g, the
619 Yéngwi, and the Yémistem. They are also the ones which reveal a
619 tendency to dominate. If Mitzic could have been considered the "geographic center" of Fang country, it would be difficult now to find for it any other significance.

4. Médoumeu District

162 Reduced to a single canton this district has less than 3,500
361 inhabitants It is maintained because of its position on the
619 frontier and because of the network of tracks used by traders which run directly to Lower Gabon and Libreville. The Oyék and the Effak are the most numerous groups, making up 13 out of the 37 villages scattered throughout the district.

361 We have applied ourselves with great precision to this whole region not only because our investigation was carried out chiefly in the Woleu-N'Tem villages, but because it plays a primary role in the development of Gabon. Its chief town, Oyem, competes with Libreville in imposing its directives on the whole Fang country. Its richer economy and better demography (the population density is more than 6.5 inhabitants per kilometer (1) make

1. Map of Captain Roumet (completed in 1912) and surveys of itineraries in the Oyem District

it a center of vitality. Closely allied to the Cameroons (from whom it receives suggestions of policy) and opening onto Spanish Guinea, it nevertheless preserves a sense of unity and a certain special spirit.

Region of the Ogooué-Ivindo

162 This region has neither the ethnic unity (it is a zone of
361 multiple contacts) nor the demographic importance (35,600 inhabitants scattered throughout three districts) of the preceding one. It is isolated and without [83] economic development; its isolation has made it a zone of refuge in a period of uncertain peace.

K2 Dominated by the great and often marshy forest, this country is
861 characterized by a very localized population indicated on a map by "strips" linked to the system of rivers. In the two districts which they occupy, Booué and Makokou, the Fang are the dominating ethnic group, forming about 45 percent and 40 percent of the total population. They are in the neighborhood of ethnic groups which are considered to be related to them, the Shaké and the
770 Bakwélé. By their migrations they have disordered the population of this region and created contacts resulting in great cultural contaminations. If one can believe Father Trilles, who noted an "archaic language" used in the legends, proverbs, and songs, and similar to Batéké, (1) the relations with the peoples of the Congo

1. Father H. Trilles, op. cit

and Gabon borders would be early.

773 According to tradition, the Fang-Maké (or Bisibé) were the first to reach the Ivindo. De Brazza finds them on the Ogooué (on the island of Zabouré). Their largest tribe is Mékuk, specifically
619 referred to by Father Trilles and specially mentioned by Tessmann on his distribution map. Outside of the Maké, the Fang of this region are in two distinct groups -- Bétsi and Nzaman -- the latter representing, according to early authors, the "true Pahouin of the Ogooué." (2) In Booué District the villages, although without clan

2 Cf. Captain Curault, "Monographie du secteur de N'Djolé au Gabon [Monograph on the N'Djolé section of Gabon]," Revue des Troupes Coloniales, 68, 1908.

homogeneity, showed at the time of the "regrouping movement" the predominance of the three great tribes, Yémôdâg, Yémvîg, and Yémisêm.

841 The Ogooué-Ivindo seems to be one of the poorest regions of
702 Gabon. Not having any economic equipment, it was only precariously active during the war effort. On the other hand, frequent recruiting has seriously affected this country (which along with

N'Gounié and Woleu-N'Tem was a "reservoir of manpower") by upsetting its demographic equilibrium. Consequently, most of the administrative reports stress the poverty and mediocrity of the villages, the political instability and "indiscipline," and the eagerness with which all innovations are greeted in the hope of improving conditions. [84]

Region of the Maritime Ogooué

During the second half of the nineteenth century the Fang descended the Ogooué in order to reach the trading centers established on the river, and the counting houses of the coast. They pushed back the Bakèlè, imposed themselves on the Galwa and the Nkomi. Since 1880 the Fang have settled in large numbers along the Ogooué as a result of a penetration which organized convoys on the river, created posts, and made possible the settlement of traders.

The Fang are settled in the four districts forming this administrative region, but in that of Omboué, the extreme point of their advance, they represent less than 5 percent of the population. Ninety-five percent of the 9,300 inhabitants of N'Djolé District are Fang who have taken the place of the ancient Bakélé people. They belong to the Maké, Nzaman, and Bétsi groups; the first of these was located downstream from N'Djolé before 1865 (1).

1. Captain Cureault, op. cit.

They came largely from the Lower Ivindo, but also from the Woleu-N'Tem, where the villagers soon sought to obtain commercial outlets on the Ogooué. Outside of a small mine exploitation at N'Djolé, this district is extremely bare. Consequently, the very scattered villages have a miserable appearance, and the male population has been canvassed (or recruited) by the neighboring lumber works and by the coastal centers.

Lambaréné District, which is very important because of its forest exploitations (and also because it is an old commercial center, still has a largely Fang population. These are in opposition to the aboriginal group of the Galwa (less than 2,200 individuals)

563 who, being related to the coastal minorities, constitute the "aristocratic race" of the country, and, having become relatively hierarchical, has known how to "preserve its position." (2)

2. Rapport Ogooué-Maritime [Maritime Ogooué Report], 3e trimestre [Third Quarter], 1935.

162 Though the Fang "have settled in a haphazard manner and a little everywhere," they have nevertheless formed two important centers of population, on the Ogooué above Lambaréné and in the area around the southern lakes. (3) They represent more than 35 percent

3 Rapport. Ogooué-Maritime [Maritime Ogooué Report], 4e trimestre [Fourth Quarter], 1935.

of the population (17,500 inhabitants) in this district of multiple ethnic groups, which in 1936 had one fifth of its inhabitants settled at the lumber works. The Fang villages here consist of 35 clans or 621 fragments, about half of the population forming a homogeneous 619 clan, while the other [85] half is composite. Apart from the Yémvung, most of the existing tribes are not found (or are unimportant) in the Woleu-N'Tem [region]. The most numerous elements seem to originate from the Ivindo. Although they reached the region forming the present-day district of Port-Gentil at the end of their push, the Fang have not succeeded in evicting the dominant ethnic groups, the Ouroungou and the Nkomi.

Region of the Estuary

162 We have already stated that the date of the arrival of the Fang at the Estuary can be set at 1850. At that time they replaced the residual coastal groupings, particularly the Bakélé who, after abandoning the Ogooué, had to leave the Como. Since 1900 the population of this region has been "nearly entirely composed of

162 Pahouin." (1) They occupy the districts of Kango and Cocobeach

1. Archives de Libreville [Archives of Libreville], 1900-1910.

(6,000 and 7,500 inhabitants): they represent more than 95 percent of the district of Libreville, if one discounts the foreign "workers" hired under contract. They have imposed themselves on Libreville (to the detriment of the aboriginal Mpongwé), where they form nearly 40 percent of the population and are dominant in 15 out of 23 sections of the town. This hold over the chief town of the territory is proof of their conquering activity.

341 618 In the district of Cocobeach, more than 20 clans or tribal fragments are present, especially Oyèk (a tribe found also at Médouneu and particularly in Spanish Guinea) and Eflak. This region, which in the past was important as a commercial center, is without any trade, and the administrative reports stress the [41] depopulation movement which is taking place. (2)

2. Cf. especially Rapport politique [Political Report] 1937, Department of the Estuary, giving a special analysis of the causes of the very high infant mortality.

162 341 618 619 Kango District at the tip of the Estuary is one of those where the demographic decline is the most marked. If the census of 1936 is accepted, there are 25 clans and fragments. The most numerous group, that of the Yéngû, accounts only for about 10 percent of Libreville District, having incorporated the former subdivision of Chinchoua, exhibits a Fang population divided to the maximum. This last region is characterized by a [86] veritable crumbling of the group. The 1943 census shows 54 clans and tribal fragments (with 2,500 inhabitants), of which only 8 contain more than 150 persons. This is also the region which has been most emptied for the benefit of the capital, where the natives of the former subdivision of Chichoua represent nearly 7 percent of the population.

162 In the part of the district that corresponds to the former subdivision
361 of Libreville, the Fang group is much more homogeneous. The
619 Oyek are dominant with 45 percent of the villagers, then come the
619 Ntum numbering 20 percent, and the Effak (Yénzôk tribe) with about 12 percent. Nine other groupings represent from 4 5 percent (Esinis) to 1, 5 percent (Omvêg) of the population of this former division. Like Chinchoua it has suffered under the attraction of Libreville.

361 If the Estuary region has been affected demographically during
619 the last fifty years, it does not seem to have changed from the point of view of clan composition. The archives of the former Como Circle [administrative unit] (1) show that the groupings now

1. For which very precise reports were drawn up in 1905 and 1909.

considered the most important constituted villages known during the years 1900-10. However, two essential differences appear: these groupings at that time existed almost isolated and not at the level of dozens of little groups.- They were localized rather definitely along the banks of the rivers, whereas they are now scattered. The villages they formed were larger than those of the present day. We have thus an indication of the process of atomization which took place during the first half of this century.

One is at first astonished at the complexity of the Fang country Outside the Upper Woleu-N'Tem, clan groupings do not appear within the limits of even small regions; they form villages which are often far apart from one another; they are scattered and intermixed. As a matter of fact, only the village grouping and the land it uses can be located on the terrain. Moreover, it is necessary to specify that the latter was stabilized, and a limit set on its mobility only at a very recent date. The fragmentation is at its maximum at the extreme end of the Fang migration, in the coastal districts and in the "zone of contact" [87] created in the surroundings of the Middle and Lower Ogooué. An average volume by clan could be calculated for each region which would give figures between

S: Balandier--19 E-5 (1946-1951) 1955 FH9 Fang FH9

361 a minimum of 64 in the former subdivision of Chinchoua and a
619 maximum of 1,000 in Kyé-Nyé Canton, (Oyem District), and in the villages situated on Bitam-Minvoul. Thus the reality and effectiveness of the clan groupings are very different according to different sections of the Fang country. Hence, it can be understood that attempts to renew the clans could only take place in regions where such a grouping still has vitality. It should also be noted that the highest average volume by clan occurs in the regions where the Fang population is greatest and where the demographic
184 situation is the most favorable. The centers of vitality are located in in the Woleu-N'Tem [area] (a large part of the district of Mitzic being excluded) and in a small zone in the neighborhood of Libreville. These two regions compete to extend their influence over the whole of the Fang country, the rivalry appearing in the elections when a candidate from Libreville is opposed by one from the Upper Gabon (legislative elections of 1951). And it can be understood that the Fang country as a whole does not show everywhere the same degree of change in the traditional social structure nor the same capacity to adapt itself to present-day conditions.

167 By transferring to a map the groupings estimated in each of the
178 districts, other facts become clear. The direction in which the dis-
619 persal took place becomes manifest. Thus the Effak coming from the frontier of the Cameroons passed by the outskirts of Spanish Guinea to reach the coast near Cocobeach and Libreville; the Angoulmvé coming from the Woleu-N'Tem reached the Ogooué (they were found in the section of N'Djolé at the beginning of this century), then Lower Gabon beyond Lambaréné, etc. Moreover, some groupings did not spread out and were found only in relatively definite regions: the Oyèk in Spanish Guinea and in the French districts south of this territory (Médouneu, Cocobeach, and Libreville), the Kojé at Bitam and Oyem, the Okip only at Oyem, etc. Finally, certain minor groupings existed only on the frontiers of the Fang country and had an independent existence. The Yengwi of Oyem remember that one of their fragments emigrated towards Kango (without knowing either the exact name or place), but none of the groupings taken by the census in this district claim a common

origin with the Yengwi of the Woleu-N'Tem. Thus [88] this last link has disappeared — the only link observed at the beginning of this century by an administrator who claimed there was an "extreme" breakup of groupings which were scattered "hundreds of kilometers from one another." (1)

1. Captain Maignan, "Etudes sur le Pays Pahouin [Studies of the Pahuin Country]," dated 1912 and published in the Bulletin de la Société des Recherches Congolaises, 14, 1931.

This fragmentation and entanglement of Fang groupings can be explained by the recent character of the migrations across Gabon and the search for economically advantageous spots, and by the pacification which makes the cohesion of numerically strong groupings no longer necessary. These were also noted by the first observers: Maignan speaks of "families camped near the Ivindo" who "have felt the need to unite in order to defend themselves from the attacks of their neighbors and who have remained united, forming uninterrupted lines of villages." (2) Finally, the role of

2. Op. cit.

the administration must be stressed: a policy of recruitment in order to have manpower at hand in the administrative centers; the reaction of certain groupings which consisted in running away from administrative ascendency ("as soon as a position is created in a populated region, a vacuum occurs in the twinkling of an eye around it," writes Périquet in a Mission report) (3); a policy of stabilizing

3. Captain Périquet, Mission d'Etude du chemin de fer du nord [Mission to Study the Northern Railroad], 1910-1911.

the population for purposes of road building and regrouping of villages (1930). The nomadism of the Fang has been the despair of the

167 administrators. But outside these most evident causes, others of
178 an internal nature giving rise to this fragmentation must be con-
619 sidered. We must retain the idea of a maximum capacity of village grouping which we will enlarge upon in the study of the social structure.

The successive ruptures of the groupings and the multiple migrations make it difficult to understand precisely the nature of the present-day groupings scattered throughout the Fang country. As for the several large groups usually recognized, we have suggested that they were migratory groups which moved at different periods after having been subject to different cultural influences, and having been the first to have occupied the Fang country in Gabon (which would explain the attempts of earlier observers to define a division into "lands"); and we have shown how their significance has become blurred. (See pp. 4-8 .) We have the proof that these names are subsequent to [89] the tribal and clan names (at least those of the oldest clans). In the Oŏlip there are collected groupings calling themselves Ntumu, Fang, and Makê (1); Tessman places the Ntumu and Fang in two different

1. Tradition des Oŏlip [Tradition of the Oŏlip], Administrative Archives of Oyem.

groups, the Nŏŏg and the Bŏkwé, (2) According to our investiga-

2. Tessmann, op. cit.

tion (confirmed by various observers), it is a question of a Nŏŏg tribe of which the Bŏkwé (a corruption of the word Ebikwe) are a clan. Curault gives another example of this: at the beginning of the century a tribe, Okana, at N'Djolé had "produced" clans called Bêtsi, Makê, and Nzaman. (3)

3. Captain Curault, "Monographie du secteur de N'Djolé au Gabon [Monograph on the Section of N'Djolé in Gabon]," op. cit.

167 If we go by the names taken in the census, we note that
178 names of different formation designate groupings that are apparent-
619 ly identical: some of the names begin with Yé or a consonant, the others begin with Esa (ésé, isi) or Eba (ébi), the names in the form of ésà or éba being the most numerous. The word ye (meaning "valley") is accompanied by a qualifier often referring to a plant, an animal, or a natural phenomenon (yé-ngwi (the boar), yé-mvâg (the rain), etc.). The prefix ésa or éba (meaning "begetter") is used to designate the posterity of a more or less remote human ancestor We must therefore surmise that in this last case we are dealing with names designating more recent groupings of secondary formation: clans and lines of descent, The other names refer to ancient groupings whose origin is legendary, who in the past were localized, and who split up and scattered due to multiple migrations; that is, they refer to tribes. The first to observe the Fang, Trilles and Martrou, are positive about these facts. So are the tribal traditions: that of the Yéndûk has preserved the memory of the first division into four clans which occured after crossing the Sanaga River (4) (principal halting place of the

4. Traditions des Yéndûk [Traditions of the Yéndûk], Administrative Archives of Ebolowa, the French Cameroons.

migrations which distributed the Fang throughout the South Cameroons and Gabon). Each important halting place of the migrations accentuated the fragmentation and created new pre-eminences. Such is the case of the Yéndûk. The crossing of the Sanaga led to a division of the groupings which are still called Yéndûk; the crossing of the N'Tem (which gives access to Gabon) resulted in the establishment of the large Effak grouping, [90] which divided to reach the coast in subgroupings who call themselves only Effak. (1)

1. Table of the "tribes and subtribes" set up by the Fang of Lower Gabon for the Commission of the Historical Investigation of Libreville.

167 Relations between groupings resulting from such successive
178 ruptures have fallen off and finally disappeared in many cases.
47 This is because of the conflicts which were often the origin of the fragmentation, because of the distance between fragments, and because of the situation resulting from colonial occupation which brought about peace so that "strong tribal solidarity" was no longer essential. (2) Other reasons are control of collective movement

2. L. Martrou, "La langue Fan et ses dialectes [Fang Language and Dialects]," Journal de la Société Africanistes, Vol. 6, p. 2, 1936.

and establishment in the interior of administrative districts which have finally brought about very localized associations. A proof of this falling off is found by comparing the tribal compositions established by L. Martrou (on the Ogooué in the first decade of the century), by those responsible for the movement of clan regrouping (in Upper Gabon after 1945), and by the investigators of the "Commission of Historical Investigation" (in Lower Gabon in 1949). These documents show great divergences which can be accounted for by local circumstances. Taking advantage of this confusion the leaders of the clan movement have been able to set up regroupings which are very questionable from the point of view of clan logic. In addition, the fact that the groupings in the course of their migrations have changed their names (affirmed by L. Martrou, Maignan, and L. Mba) (3) tends to accentuate this con-

3. L. Martrou, op. cit.; Captain Maignan, op. cit.; and L. Mba, "Essai de droit coutumier pahouin [Essay on Pahouin Common Law]," Recherches Congolaises, 35, 1938.

fusion. It can therefore be understood that the limited and definitely located groupings have been for many years the only ones that are truly effective -- and, at the same time, which enjoy a kind of independence.

Sr Balandier--24 E-8 (1946-1951) 1955 FH9 Fang FH9

## II. The Demographic Situation of the Fang

161 Not only the administrators of the Fang country but also the villagers themselves are aware of an unfavorable demographic situation. For more than twenty-five years the administrative and medical reports have stressed the "seriousness of the demographic problem." The Fang, alarmed by the numerical [91] decline of their groupings, show us their anxiety by asking that their women be treated medically so as "to have a great many children, as in the past." This feeling of demographic deficiency, added to fragmentation and the lack of power in the groupings, constitutes one of the characteristics of the various Fang "crises." Unfortunately, not all the documents necessary for a detailed study exist. Census taking has only been accurate in the last few years, and the administrative limits which form the framework of the census have changed frequently.

The only study of the whole to which we can refer is that of a physician, Dr. Le Dentu. It is based on information furnished by the local health reports and applies to more than 84,000 individuals. (1) It draws attention to the "great local differences."

1. Gal Le Dentu, "Démographie de l'A.E.F. [Demography of French Equatorial Africa]," Archives du Service de Santé [Archives of the Health Service], Brazzaville, 1937.

The Fang race, which shows a deficit in the regions of the Maritime Ogooué and of the Estuary -- where the replacement indices are 0.8 and 0.7, respectively -- displays a "much greater vitality" among the Woleu Fang and the Bakwélé of the Sangha, whose indices are 1.05 and 1.08. The author tends to explain these differences by the very different degrees of evolution [sic] of each of these groups. Such an opinion requires interpretation. One must take into account not only the methods of evolution (the present-day peasantry of Woleu-N'Tem is one of the healthiest of French Equatorial Africa while being wide open to modern

[6] influences) but also the conditions of nature affecting each of these groups. These conditions as well as economic factors (intensive forestry exploitation) and factors of social disorganization have created in Lower Gabon the most unfavorable demographic situation (the highest degree of sterility and the lowest "genital capacity"). The whole ethnic condition of the Fang remained stationary during the decade 1930-40 (2.3 percent births for 2 percent deaths). How can this feeling of a demographic crisis be explained?

One must consider a disequilibrium which, combined with colonial establishment and exploitation (or aggravated by them), was only very recently broken. It is difficult to be sure, for we have at our disposal only fragmentary information of unequal value. The first calculations of population density [92] made about 1910 by G. Bruel (1) and Périquet (2) give much higher results than those

1. G. Bruel, Notes géographiques sur le Bassin de l'Ogooué [Geographic Notes on the Ogooué Basin], Paris, 1911.

2. Captain Périquet, Mission d'Etude du chemin de fer du Nord [Mission for the Study of the Northern Railroad], Archives Brazzaville.

obtained at the present time. Concerning the Woleu-N'tem the geographer G. Sautter was able to make precise comparisons and was convinced that "from the time of the French penetration until about 1930 population ... has diminished considerably." He recalls that "where Périquet estimated the population density as 4.5 inhabitants per kilometer (2) ...., twenty years later [ a figure of] less than 2 [ ] is found," and that such a divergence cannot be wholly

2. Captain Periquet, Mission d'etude du chemin de fer du Nord [Mission for the Study of the Northern Railroad], Archives Brazzaville.

attributed to the optimism of this observer who "seems to have been conservative." (3) G. Sautter thinks that such a population,

3. G. Sautter, "Essai sur le peuplement et l'habitat au Woleu-Ntem" [Essay on the Population and Habitat in Woleu-Nt'Tem], Cahiers d'Outre-Mer, 14, April-June, 1951.

"itself deficient" (for causes which appear in part of a natural order since they occur "from one end to the other of the equatorial forest bloc"), has been sorely tried by endemic diseases and famine as well as by emigration and recruiting. Stabilization, which has asserted itself during the last two decades along with the equipment and enrichment of the region, is still tenuous. Because of this G. Sautter will not risk making any forecast on the future evolution of the Woleu-N'Tem population. He recognizes that the Fang of this region are a "flourishing population when compared to their congeners of the Ivindo, the Ogooué, and the coast, who are in a far worse position."

The fragility of this equilibrium was apparent at the time of the "war effort." The political report of Woleu-N'Tem (1944) pays particular attention to the problem of depopulation. It shows a large excess of deaths over births (22.1 percent versus 15.9), and it stresses the serious recrudescence of the migratory movement -- an official estimate gives 4,500 adult men (that is more than 20 percent of the adult male population) who at that time had gone to Spanish Guinea. That is to say, that the results obtained since 1930 by [our] population policy have remained eminently precarious. While still one of the most vigorous ethnic groups of Gabon, the Fang have a handicap which makes them sensitive to any critical situation, as was apparent during the last years of the war. There is no medical report that [93] still boasts, as did the early observers, of the robustness and prolicacy of the Pahouin.

With the help of precise investigations made in Woleu-N'Tem, we have been able to study the structure of the Fang population in this relatively favorable region. The most apparent fact is the

5: Balandier--27 E-5 (1946-1951) 1955 FH9 Fang FH9

 disproportion between the number of men and women, which becomes accentuated at the level of age groups called "adult" (according to present-day administrative census, these begin at

WOLEU-N'TEM

District of Oyem
11 villages, 1,570 inhabitants.

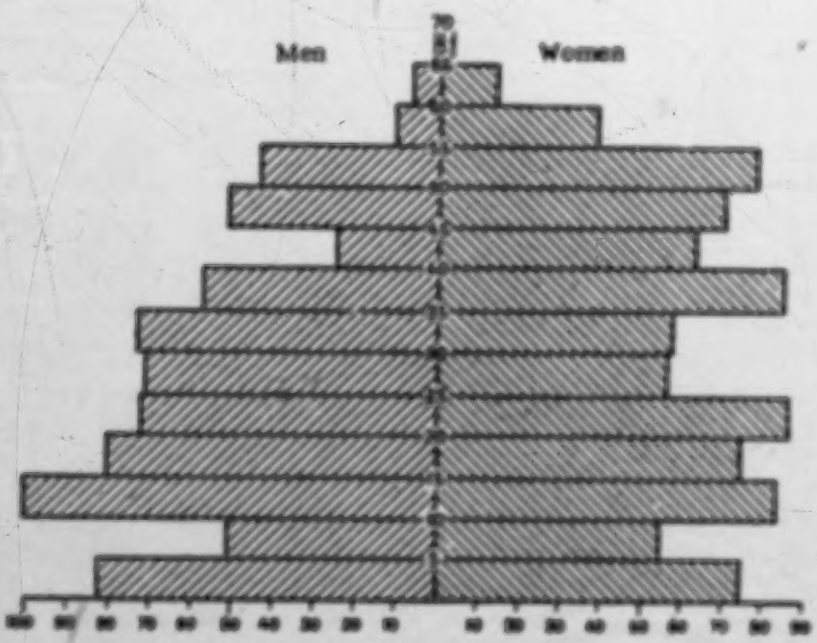



Fig. 2
Distribution by Age and by Sex.

fifteen years of age). The censuses of 1936 and of 1960 show this clearly, although there has been a reduction in the disequilibrium during the last fifteen years.

fr Balandier--28 E-5 (1948-1951) 1955 FHI9 Pang FHI9

Table I

142 Distribution of the Sex Ratio [Woleu-N'Tem Region]

| | | Entire Region | Bitam-Minvoul | Oyem | Mitzic | Médouneu (1) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Number of women per 1,000 men (total population) | 1936 | 1,283 | 1,170 | 1,239 | 1,241 | |
| | 1951 | 1,147 | 1,184 | 1,142 | 1,161 | 1,125 |
| Number of women per 1,000 men (population called adult) | 1936 | 1,521 | 1,443 | 1,598 | 1,523 | |
| | 1951 | 1,373 | 1,443 | 1,337 | 1,323 | 1,300 |

1 Médouneu did not belong administratively to the Woleu-N'Tem region in 1936.

In order to make these general indications more specific, we took the census of eleven villages in Oyem District, where we made our investigation and which have a [total] population of 1,570 inhabitants. The distribution of these by age group and by sex (Fig. 2) confirms the preceding observation. In the eleven villages there are 838 women for 732 men, that is, a ratio of 1,144, for 1.142 for the whole district. The disequilibrium between the sexes is very different according to the age considered.

Table II

| Age Group | 0 | 10 | 20 | 30 | 40 | 50 | 60 | years |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Number of women per 1,000 men | 955 | 868 | 996 | 1,083 | 1,728 | 2,197 | | |

162 If one excludes the drop revealed for the group from ten to twenty years of age (which can be explained partly by mistakes in estimating ages of the women, who are usually made older by the census takers), (1) it can be seen that the number of women

1. The census takers simply estimate the age when the birth date is either contested or forgotten; there are practically no vital statistics recorded.

increases [95] going from one age group to the next, the increase being particularly marked over 40 years of age. One must consider first of all a higher male mortality, which is apparent by comparing the figures obtained in the census taking. Thus the census of 1936 shows a male mortality of over 60 percent of the total mortality, with a maximum of 66.6 percent in Oyem District. But this alone does not explain the disproportions observed. Keeping in mind the date of 1930 which marks the slowing up of emigration and the end of recruiting on a large scale, (1)

1. Cf. G. Sautter, op. cit.

one notes that the men of over twenty at this time are those who are now over forty; the deficit in men of the oldest age group represents especially those emigrants who did not return and those who died in the lumbering operations. The reduction in the disequilibrium from 1936 to 1951 tends to confirm this statement. One must also bear in mind a factor arising from the social organization. The young women (from ten to twenty years of age) are given in marriage to foreign groups before being compensated for by foreign women, [who are eventually] brought into the local group in marriage, through the brice-prices received for the former.

Dr. Le Dentu's report made it apparent that in 1936 the whole Fang nation showed an insufficient child population. The groups from zero to fifteen years amounted to 28.4 percent, while among other Gabon peoples, the Eschira for example, they represent

162 nearly 36 percent of the population. The figures furnished by the census of 1950 do not indicate any improvement, at least so far as the districts of Bitam-Minvoul and Mitzic are concerned.

Table III

| District | Bitam-Minvoul | Oyem | Mitzic | Médouneu |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Percentage of child population | 29.3% | 35.3% | 25.4% | 32.3% |

[96] The most unfavorable situation is at Mitzic; this partially explains the loss of 2,092 inhabitants in this district from 1936 to 1940, which is more than 20 percent of its present population and about half the loss suffered by the Woleu-N'Tem region during the same period. The demographic state seems to be at its best in Oyem District. However, since 1936 the population to within a hundred units has remained merely stationary. Our investigation covering eleven villages shows to what extent this situation is affected by the changes in economic and political circumstances. The years of the war effort (1940-45) are shown by a lacuna at the level of the five- to ten-year-old group, while the return to normal conditions and the relative prosperity due to the increase in cacao production entail a broadening of the demographic base at the level of the children from zero to five years old (Fig. 2). Accurate census taking in nine villages in the neighborhood of Oyem in 1945, 1946, and 1948 show an increase from 1,090 to 1,133 inhabitants with a replacement index of 1.32. In addition, while the excess of births is only 13 units, the increase in population is 43 units. This increase implies above all a return of former emigrants.

These facts confirm the extreme demographic sensitivity and indicate the quick reaction to changes in local politics. But this sensitivity is only apparent because of a poor situation. In spite of normal fertility (the genital capacity, the mean number of

In spite of normal fertility (the genital capacity, the mean number of pregnancies in women by the time of menopause, is 4.2 for the whole district), the number of children is not sufficient because of the high infant mortality (see the following table), and also apparently because of the aging of the female population. Serious malarial diseases affecting 78 percent of the children from two to five years old are the reasons for this mortality as well as intestinal parasitosis.

[97] Table IV

(Based on the medical report of the 4th quarter of 1946)

| District | Birth Rate | Rate of mortality from 0 to 1 year | Rate of infant mortality | Percentage of child population with reference to total population |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Bitam | 1.3% | 7.1% of deaths | 27% of deaths | 29% |
| Minvoul | 1.3% | 7.3% of deaths | 13% of deaths | 25% |
| Oyem | 1.7% | 10% of deaths | 20% of deaths | 34% |
| Mitzic | 0.8% | 6.7% of deaths | 18% of deaths | 25% |

These figures should be completed by stating that infant mortality which is very high from zero to one year diminishes from one to five years and drops meaningfully only from this age on. Dr. Le Dentu in 1936 gave for the whole Fang people, for each of these categories, the following percentages: 16.5 percent, 12 percent, and 8.9 percent of deaths, which indicates the catastrophic situation in certain parts of the Pahouin country

Such are the figures as they appear in the privileged region of the Woleu-N'Tem. They are still higher when the whole

administrative division is taken into account, especially at the end of a period of crisis, as is shown by the health study of 1944, or when one considers only the most restricted village groupings that are the most affected. The diagrams for the three villages of Oyem (Fig. 3) are characteristic.

However this demographic situation appears excellent when it is compared to that of the Fang of other regions. In this respect we give as an example the Fang of the Ogooué-Ivindo about whom we have information gathered during the year 1947: [98] [Fig. 3.]

[99]

Index of replacement: 0.43.
Birth rate: 0.77 percent.
Percentage of child population: 24.7 percent.
Total mortality rate: 1.79 percent.
Infant mortality rate: 25 percent of deaths.(1)

1. Economic report of the Ogooué-Ivindo; chapter on "Demography."

And a slightly earlier report (1946) on the essentially Fang district of Booué shows complementary percentages which are still more significant: a genital capacity of 2.7 and for the young women a fertility rate (mean number of reported pregnancies) of 1.2, these figures being far below those obtained from the Fang of the Woleu-N'Tem. Incidentally, "35 to 40 percent of the young women remain sterile while the percentage of sterility in the older women does not exceed 8 to 12 percent." (2) The Fang

2. Population Commission, Official Report of the Meeting of August 8, 1946.

of the Ogooué-Ivindo are registered in a region where all the ethnic groups show a demographic decline and which has lost a seventh of its population from 1934 to 1947. Their situation is comparable to that of their congeners of Lower Gabon who, as Dr. Le Dentu pointed out, show a marked deficit.

Akok Village

100 inhabitants




Yosse Village

111 inhabitants




Nto Village

142 inhabitants

Fig. 3
Age Pyramids of Three Kõlé Villages
(Villages numerically reduced)

162 We have been able to define the characteristics of this demographic crisis, of which the Fang as a whole are aware. These are a drop in the population, which is more or less checked according to the region and circumstances; a lack of balance between the number of men and of women — the sex ratio rising rapidly at the level of the oldest age groups — and a more marked aging of the feminine population; an insufficient demographic basis and at the same time a high infant mortality. And it is 168 578 the lack of children and the sudden importance acquired by women (conditioned by their number as well as by the general movement of social evolution) of which the villagers complain, far more than they criticize the inadequacy of sanitary equipment. In a society where the number [that is, the size of the groups] differentiates the groupings in a hierarchical system, and permits personal preeminence, the acute phases of this demographic crisis arouse great anxiety; the decline of fecundity in the women is one of the reasons, the most important one perhaps, for the hostility of the men toward the women.

168 The grounds given for such a situation [100] have a double aspect, modernist and traditionalist. The grounds of the former were displayed at the time of the Pahouin Congress of 1947 and also by certain groupings at the time of the movement for regrouping clans. They are expressed by definite claims, such as demanding a health program and education in hygiene, a desire to control and then limit prostitution, to consolidate the "family" by limiting divorce and curbing adultery, a need for rich crops "that can be sold in order to support the family," (1) etc. The grounds of the 168 186

1. Statement by a Dignitary of the Yémõdûg Tribe, Mitzic, 1949.

traditionalists without doubt compel recognition and represent the opinion of the greatest number. They reveal a strong reaction to the present state of Fang society and a desire to return to a past when everything was better, when there were "a great many men and a great many children"; they express a tendency toward "counter-acculturation." The upheavals that have occurred in

168 the social and cultural organizations are directly blamed: the
166 breaking up and dispersal of the groupings resulting in the rupture
of fundamental interdictions (especially that of exogamy: with the
[335] present confusion each man risks marrying his "sister" and being
condemned to a sterile union); the abandonment of traditional
religious observances, especially the Bíéri worship rendered to
[749] ancestors — so that the Bíéri "revenger" itself, "according to cer-
892 tain informants, by making the women sterile. Borrowing from
European civilization and from their neighbors has altered "Fang
manners" and resulted in behavior that is not valid for the Fang
and puts their social existence in danger. These are the principal
reasons brought forth. We have already in this chapter paid par-
ticular attention to these facts, because they show the subjective
aspect of the demographic crisis and how much the search for
fertility and for power, both linked together, still plays a part in
the present reactions of this people, how it takes effect in an
ambiguous manner by having recourse at the same time to modern
foreign methods and to traditional Fang methods. For the Fang
villagers the crisis is the most serious consequence of a situation
created by colonization — by "civilization," as some of them
curiously say. This is sufficient indication that these facts must
be integrated in the whole we have undertaken to analyze.

[101] III. The Type of Social Structure (1)

1. A study carried out with the help of documents collected especially among the Fang of the Woleu-N'Tem, and principally in Oyem region where Fang vitality is the most authentic.

Tribes, Clans, and Lineages

596 The recent clan renewal to which we have often referred has shown the still fundamental importance of the groupings established as a function of "kinship." This was immediately grasped by the first observers and administrators of the Fang country, who insisted on the "family" nature of the Pahouin groupings and came to the

596 conclusion that a substantial social framework did not exist. A report written at the beginning of the century notes the impossibility "of finding an embryo of organization," emphasizing that there exist only more or less extended "families."

596 867 In the past the educational system very early gave the young Fang an exact knowledge of his genealogy (abara). Father Trilles writes that "the young man is particularly taught the individual list of his ancestors, which only concerns the male generations, (for) the woman is ignored," and, moreover, she never receives such instruction. (2) By knowing the relationships within his

2. Father Trilles, Le totémisme chez les Fan [Totemism Among the Fang], notes on pp. 109, 111, 180.

paternal line, the individual knows to which fundamental groupings he belongs, which women are forbidden him, and what relations he should have with such-and-such individuals, both living and dead. By more and more distant links he attaches himself to groupings that are more and more widely extended and are of more and more ancient formation. The first of these [groups] in which he finds himself immediately entered is the nd'a bot, a patrilocal group at the village level which often has its own locality and communal house, which gather together, under the authority of the "eldest," or mbi-mbot, the latter's posterity, his younger brothers and their posterity, and sometimes that of his paternal uncles; in addition, the [posterity] of individuals who are tied to him by bonds of kinship, adoption, or friendship. The most extended of 649 these [groups] is the "tribe" (ayog, formerly ayom, studied by Martrou and Trilles, whose origin is neither located nor dated, but simply legendary, and whose dispersed took place throughout nearly the whole of the Fang country. [102] The intermediate groupings spread out concentrically from one to the other; the relations existing between the individuals they contain are expressed by a "fraternity" that is less and less real and less and less binding.

We have kept the term "tribe," used by the first observers of the Fang, to designate this earliest formed grouping, which is

619 now the most comprehensive, the most dispersed, the least active, and which traces its origin to a legendary ancestor -- or mvam -- now Christianized by some (thus, Adam-Nzamb among the Ndbg) Its unity is indicated by a name, a motto, and special tattooing and symbols. (1) Before the last great migrations the tribe had a rela-

1. These symbols are clearly described by Trilles, Largeau, and, particularly, by Tessmann (op. cit.).

tively definite location and was divided only into a limited number of clans (for example, 6 in the case of the Yévb). The migrations going toward and through the South Cameroons and Gabon have created a long series of upheavals, as is evidenced by the various tribal legends which ascribe the great fragmentations and dispersals to the crossing of the Upper Sanaga (Lom) and of the "Adzap hole" (symbolizing access to the great forest). Thus the Yévb (2) trace back to this "crossing" the separation into 10 group-

2. Légendes des Yévb [Legends of the Yévb], Archives of Ebolowa.

ings going toward the region of N'Tem (6 groups), toward Gabon (3 groups), and toward the coast after following along the Nyong (one group). These last have also undergone a process of a chain of upheavals and dispersals themselves, which we shall analyze by means of recent examples. Father Trilles was able to show how, following this movement, the tribal name was preserved only for the "clan of the founder of the tribe and (for) that which was founded by one of his sons or descendants in direct line." (3) In

3. Father Trilles, op. cit., p. 130.

this last case a prefix signifies that it applies to a secondary group: thus the tribal name Yémvi survives only under the forms of Yémvi and Esamvi. However, such clans manifest a pre-eminence which is at the base of the social organization: that of the "eldest" and of the line of descent from the eldest [ones]. The legitimacy of

619 this pre-eminence was also guaranteed by the possession of the skulls of ancestors (*évora bidri*), which were transmitted "from eldest son to eldest son." (4) Nowadays, because of the extreme

4. Idem., p. 113.

dispersal of the tribal fragments and the near-disappearance of the Bidri cult, because [103] of the small number of such groupings and the relaxing of relations between groupings, these clans do not have the benefit of a privileged situation and did not always play a major role at the time of the clan movement -- some have even assimilated at that time by more vigorous tribes. (1) They were

1. "Such a group that believed itself a tribe (*ayong*) would find itself demoted to the level of a simple clan," writes the author of a Rapport sur le regroupement des Fan [Report on the Regrouping of the Fang], March, 1948.

not able to maintain the feeling of tribal reality or the solemn gatherings (*ésama*, *éyulan*) which confirmed this feeling periodically, while the Cameroons groupings, who were less divided and less scattered, have preserved them. This explains their exemplary role during recent years.

619 The term "clan" therefore remains reserved for the groupings whose lines of descent go back to a real ancestor (*ésa*, the *ésa* being opposed to the *mvam* as "real kinship" is to "spiritual kinship"). These groupings express themselves locally far more than the tribe (by clan patches or echeloned villages), and have imposed a strict and unquestionable exogamy. They participate in the system of alliances set up by the interplay of marriage and have a special name -- while the inferior groupings are not named. The colonial administration knows the Fang groupings by their clan names and these have been used in taking the census. These names have a characteristic morphology because of their prefixes *ésa* or *éba*. The clans have also been subjected to rupture. Groupings

6 FH9 moved from the lines which originally constituted them may be separated by great distances or may even be in foreign territory (in Gabon and in Spanish Guinea, for example). Nevertheless, whatever their average size, depending on the location, there remain a few groupings which are imposed on individuals in a specific way: particularly by belonging (one is an Esibil, Esakora, etc.) and by "fraternity" (expressed by the title mwanansyôg), which they imply. The word ayôg is also used today to designate the clan. This seems to be its true original meaning; it has only taken on the nonspecific meaning to the extent that tribal reality became blurred at the time of recent migrations, resulting in the near disappearance of the word characterizing it (aybm). The value of this interpretation becomes obvious when one refers to the observations made by Tessmann, who, at the beginning of the century, pointed out the existence of groupings called ayôg who were more or less united at the higher level to constitute [104] [Fig. 4.] [105] the largest grouping, which he calls "tribe" (ayem). This confusion is significant of the profound upheavals that have occurred and explains the uncertainties shown by Father Trilles in this respect.

6 FH9
776
178 This author, besides, has stressed the existence of a Fang totemism which could be seen [to extend] from the tribe to the individual, and extended out to the various groupings. But he also took care to point out that this was in the process of disappearing at the beginning of the century on the Ogooué and in the coastal regions. A valuable estimate has been made of this fantastic theory by Van Gennep, who writes: "All our efforts to limit the terms totem and totemism to a well-defined category are nonexistent for Father Trilles, who manages to make of the totem the equivalent of the Latin genius or of any other protecting spirit of any individuals or groups whatsoever." (1) We cannot discuss now an absolete

1. A. Van Gennep, L'Etat actuel du problème totémique [The Present State of the Totem Problem], Paris, 1920, p. 35.

quarrel -- more especially as rapid changes during the last fifty years have changed or destroyed the elements necessary for any

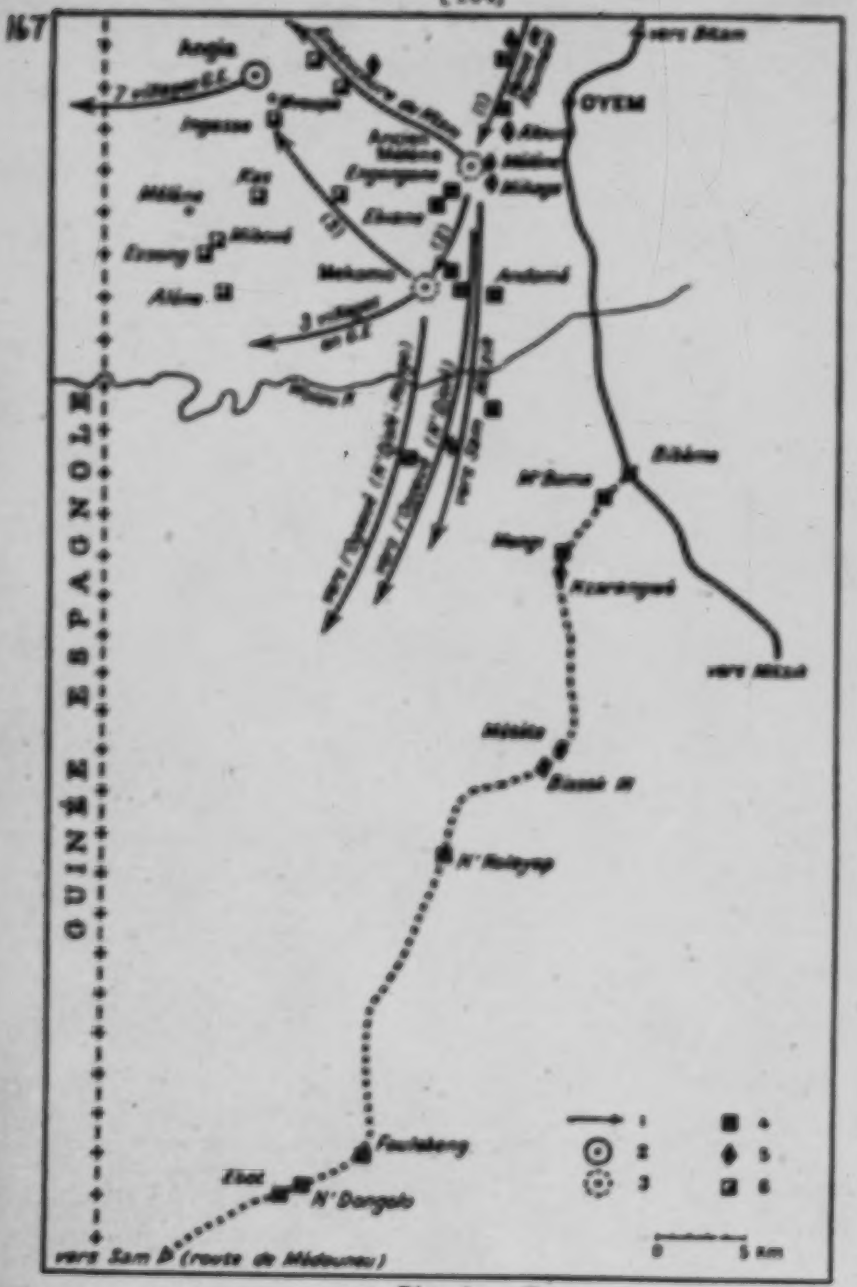



Fig. 4

Dispersal of the Yengwi around Oyem.
(Esɔ́nɔ́ Angɔ́ lineage)

Legend: 1. Important displacements; 2. Center of Dispersal;
3. Vanished Center of dispersal; 4. Group of Mɔnomvɔgo Esɔnɔ;
5. Groups of Nsim Esɔnɔ; 6. Groups of Efwana Mɔmomvɔgo.

opinion – but we can remember from the facts reported by Father Trilles the indication that a protecting being, a body of religious material (akamayon), a collection of symbols, and a body of beliefs and legends gave a uniformity, other than a genealogical one, to the Fang clans.

The agnate lines of descent with a more or less limited number of generations have played, and still play, an important role. Around them are organized the groupings forming the village or village groups which were established by the nomadic groups noted by the first observers. In this respect the history of progressive distribution throughout Gabon is significant. We will give the example of the Téngwi, of which a fragment represented by twenty-five villages is established in the Oyem region in the Woleu-N'Tem. They are all attached to an ancestor called Esono Ango, who is said to have come from the legendary place Adïa Mbura and to have led the first journeys through the South Cameroons. He is still considered the founder (abial) of the groupings existing today. These, consisting of about 3,500 individuals, are especially concentrated in the southern part of Kyé-Nyé, Canton, north of the Woleu River. Starting from this region where the first Téngwi villages were established and where a compact nucleus of more than [106] 1,500 individuals is still in existence, a great migration took place in the direction of present-day Spanish Guinea (in to villages) from the mouth of the N'Tem, the Ogooué, and the Gabon. The large grouping thus formed by the lines issued from Esono Ango and settled at the level of a demarcated region constitutes an abial à bot, or major linage. Although these lines are spread out through ten generations, there exist real bonds between members of the grouping, even if their "kinship" goes back to Esono Ango, and which are sufficient to make possible the aggregation of dissident elements from one village to another.

The word abial implies an idea of localization. It may signify "place of birth," "place of origin." (1) The groupings called

1. Cf. Mgr. L. Martrou, Lexique Fãn-Français [Fang-French Lexicon], Paris, Procure Générale, not dated.

616 621 abisi ò bot are distinguishable by a double criterion, one genealogical -- a limited but definite localization. All those that we have studied in Woleu-N'Tem relate themselves to an ancestor who led the last migrations through the present-day Cameroons, and enabled (or realized) the crossing of the N'Tem, and to the first settlements beyond this river, from which each clan fragment spread out and migrated. In the case of the just mentioned Yêngwi, Esbob Angb established the first village created south of the N'Tem; his two sons, Mbobmvbgb Esbob (the eldest) and Nsim Esbob, after having lived for some time in the midst of the same grouping, separated and founded the first two Yêngwi villages of the Oyem region. From these two centers the lineages began to organize themselves independently, from the third generation on, and to distribute themselves as is shown in Fig. 5.

Before the administration had transformed, for reasons of its own benefit, the reality of the village, recomposing and displacing it, the village corresponded to the men issued from one line of descent, including a variable number of generations, and to those clients [dependents]. The Yêngwi village of Ebiane, for example, still includes the major portion of the lineage born of Egwaga Mbobmvbgb, second son of Mbobmvbgb Esbob, -- which goes back for eight generations. The only unattached elements created the present-day small villages of Nkoum and Bibasse (22 and 65 inhabitants), which have remained on the outskirts of the original grouping. But the village itself, [107] [Fig. 5.] [108 and 109] [Fig. 6] [110] as soon as it has reached an average size, includes a definite number of minor lineages which represent the still present posterity of the group of real brothers and of half brothers (bobém̃g) who formed the initial cell. Ebiane has three of these minor lineages that coincide with the three lines of descent issued from the three sons of Egwaga Mbobmvbgb, and are named after them. These are the previously mentioned nd'é bot -- this term containing the idea of descent, the minor lineages found at the base of the hierarchy of the groupings (see Fig 6, for an example of their distribution in the midst of a group of Kobe villages established in the vicinity of Oyem).

Fig. 5.
Tengwi of the Vicinity of Oyem

Generations:



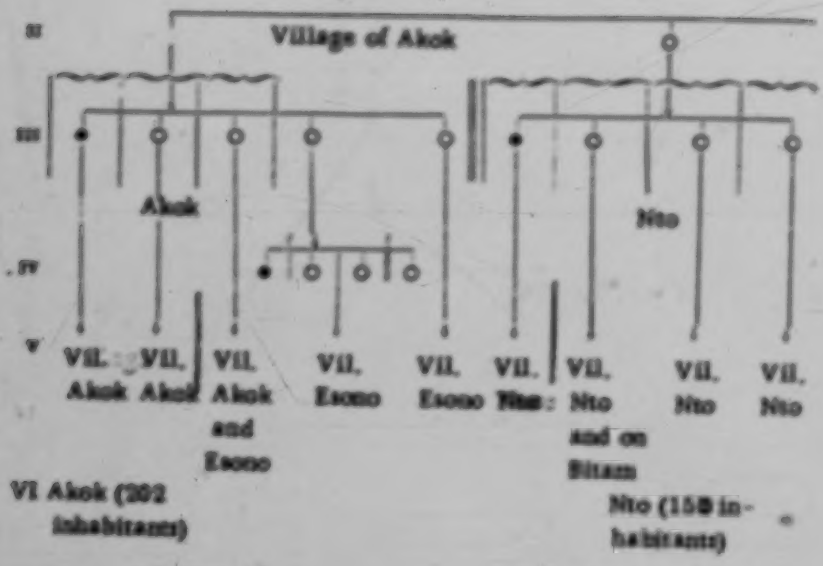
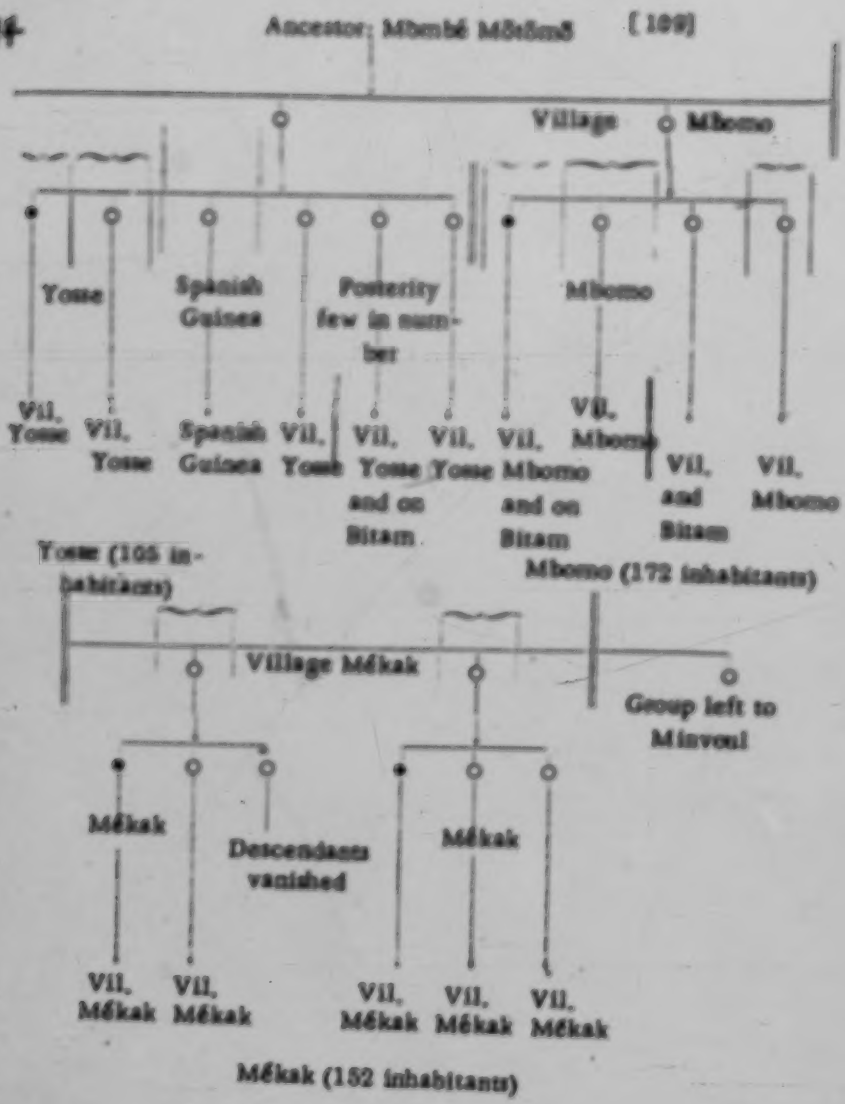



Fig. 6

Example of "fragmentation": Koje in the Vicinity of Oyem

Legend:

Eldest brother
Younger brothers
nd'e bbt recognized at the village level
Lines of fission.


Ancestor: Mbembé Mbôôm5 [109]
Village Mbomo
Yosse
Spanish Guinea
Posterity few in number
Mbomo
Vil. Yosse
Vil. Yosse
Spanish Guinea
Vil. Yosse
Vil. Yosse and on Bitam
Vil. Yosse
Vil. Mbomo and on Bitam
Vil. Mbomo
Vil. and Bitam
Vil. Mbomo
Yosse (105 inhabitants)
Mbomo (172 inhabitants)
Village Mékak
Group left to Minvoul
Mékak
Descendants vanished
Mékak
Vil. Mékak
Vil. Mékak
Vil. Mékak
Vil. Mékak
Vil. Mékak
Mékak (152 inhabitants)

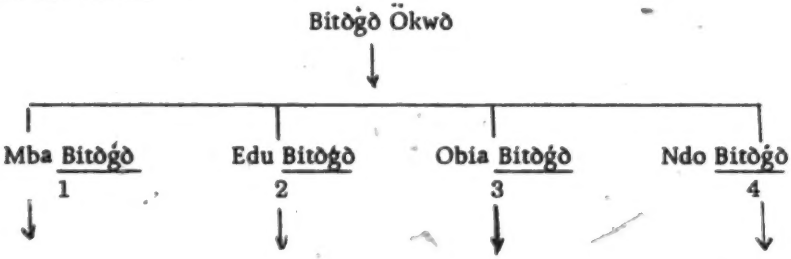
611
614 This structure by interlocked lineages appears to be the primary characteristic of Fang society. One can therefore understand the importance attached in the past to the minute knowledge held by each individual of the elements of his paternal line. By means of the system of naming used by the Fang – a name of two units constructed by using as the second unit of the son's name the first unit of the father's name – the line of descent appears as a chain in which it is impossible to omit a single unit. Thus, Ntutum Ngéma of Sam village in Mitzic region (Esabökâ clan) can link the names of his male ancestors up to the fourteenth generation:

| Generations | Known ancestors |
|---|---|
| X | Y |
| ↑ | ↑ |
| 14 | Éba Zi |
| 13 | Möbyèn Éba |
| 12 | Zɔ̀gɔ̀ Möbyèn |
| 11 | Ekwikwi Zɔ̀gɔ̀ |
| 10 | Mâfɔ Ekwikwi |
| 9 | Sé Mâfɔ |
| 8 | Étɔ̀gɔ̀ Sé — Nki Sé |
| 7 | Tsa Étɔ̀gɔ̀ |
| 6 | Okwɔ Tsa |
| 5 | Bitɔ̀gɔ̀ Okwɔ |
| 4 | Édu Bitɔ̀gɔ̀ |
| 3 | Bɔ̀gɔ̀ Édu |
| 2 | Ngéma Bɔ̀gɔ̀ |
| 1 | Ntutum Ngéma |

2 3 4 4

Although this knowledge is limited, Ntutum Ngéma is able to place himself in the lineage issued from Eba Zi, who led the [111] migrations across the South Cameroons, and in that of Sé Mâfɔ, who led a fragment of the Esabökâ as far as present-day Gabon. He can also place himself in relation to intermediate lineages (Étɔ̀gɔ̀ Sé and Nki Sé) and to minor lineages (four sons of Bitɔ̀gɔ̀ Ɔ̀kwɔ), which are still represented in the region and within the village.

614 551 Incidentally, the method of naming peculiar to the Fang is evidence of a fundamental social segment, the group of brothers, real and half (siblings and half-siblings). Thus there are the sons of Bitɔ̀gɔ̀ Ökwo who form the "heads" of four minor lineages still in existence:



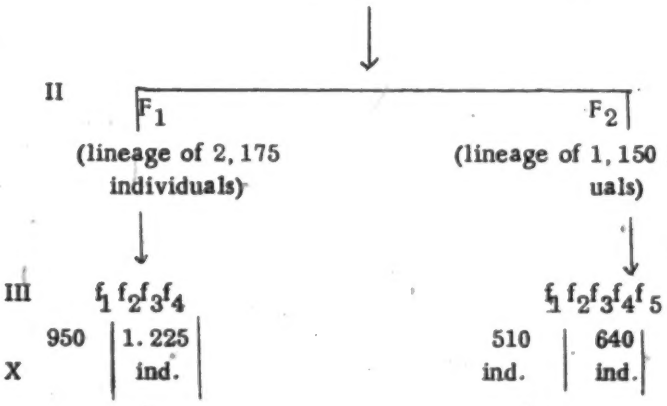

The names themselves emphasize this double orientation, the vertical showing the real filiation and the horizontal showing the real brotherhood, which characterizes Fang social structure. Around such a horizontal segment the village (in this particular case Sam village) is constituted, and inside such a segment are produced the fissions giving birth to separate lineages. From the clan to the minor lineage the groupings must be defined in terms of these two dimensions, thus showing a structure that could be called both segmental and interlocked.

614 578 621 But this overlapping is not sufficient to bind the groupings together and to impose a hierarchy. Ruptures have been frequent and can be explained by the mechanism of Fang expansion, by economic factors, and by causes of a structural nature. By analyzing the lineages settled at the level of a fixed region, one notes that those whose origin goes back to an eldest son (ntɔ̀l-mɔ̀t are larger in number and are the basis of the local population. The Yèngwi studied above show this very specifically?

614 [112] Yèngwi in the Vicinity of Oyem
578
621

Generations

I Esǒnɔ̀ Angɔ̀
(lineage of 3, 325 individuals)




Each of the definitely located clan fragments reveals the existence of two groupings which are in a state of latent antagonism, which is shown, geographically, by the separate villages. The cleavage is such that at the time of the recent movement for regrouping villages, initiated entirely by the natives, each of the two antinomic elements refused to join together in order to create larger and more modernized village units. (1) Every time the

1. At the time of our investigation of a Kɔ̀jé grouping, for example, most of our informants asserted tirelessly that "the village will break apart if all the Kɔ̀jé mingled

fission has been carried out between lineages issued from an "eldest" and the lineages issued from younger brothers. The five clan groupings studied in the Oyem region revealed this rupture – going back to the time of their settlement in the country – with irrefutable clarity (see Table V).

Table V

614
578
621

| Clans | Groupings descended from the eldest | Groupings descended from younger son or sons | Villages corresponding to the first grouping | Villages corresponding to the second grouping |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Yégnwi | Lineage of Mɔ̀nɔ̀mɔ́gɔ̀ Ésɔ̀nɔ̀ | Lineage of Nsim Esɔ̀nɔ̀ | Ebiane, etc... | Zorongone, etc... |
| Effak | Lineage of Ngu Mâmvé | Lineage of Môndu Mâmvé | Nto, etc.. | Mékomo, etc... |
| Ožip | Lineage of Enduma Eswa | Lineage of Emvélé | Nkang | Mbenga, etc... |
| Yébimvé | Lineage of Ekɔ̀rɔ̀ Mési | Lineage of Obiré Mési | Afémame, etc... | Angone, etc... |
| Kojé | Lineage of Mɔ̃zɔ̀gɔ̀ Môbé | Lineages of five younger sons | Nto, etc... | Mbomo, etc... |

[113] This state of tension, bringing about more or less real fissions, is bound up with a social organization which gives economic and political pre-eminence to the "eldest," [sons] which favors the lineages issued from them, and which, above all, is not hierarchic for the purpose of maintaining the cohesion of groupings, except as needed for defense and expansion, and except for the prestige of temporary "chiefs." The desire for independence manifested by the heads of lineages as soon as their grouping has become fairly large is not controlled in an organized manner. Studies conducted during the first years of this century, especially those of Martrou and Trilles, all insist on the process of fragmentation of

614 lineages which is more marked as the Fang become unattached
578 conquerors. In the same way frequent examples have been given
621 of extensive agglomerations being broken up after the death of the "chief" who had founded and maintained them. The size and cohesion of the groupings appear therefore in a large measure to depend on the personality of the leaders who have asserted themselves (for any rightful succession may be contested under pretext of incapacity, or it may be refused) and on circumstances. This explains in part the frequency of fissions observed by various authors at the level of the third or fourth generation. (1) The size

1. Particularly, E. Trezenem, "Notes ethnographiques sur les tribus Fan du Moyen-Ogooué [Ethnographic Notes on the Fang Tribes of the Middle Ogooué]," op. cit.

of localized groupings may therefore vary a great deal – especially since the pacification of the country – going from the major lineage expressed in "clan patches" to the minor lineage (nd'è bòt) forming an isolated hamlet.

Kinship

612 Our analysis of Fang society has so far considered groupings only in terms of two fundamental elements: paternal filiation and real fraternity. We must now examine the bonds created and the relations prescribed by other modalities of kinship, as well as by the alliances that may exist between "foreign" groupings as a result of marriages.

612 Through the medium of his father (ésa, whom he calls taga)
601 and of his mother (nya, whom he calls nanö), the individual belongs to two kinship groupings, the paternal (ésinyâg) and the maternal (dzânanö). For the young Fang these two have neither the same significance nor the same importance. [114] The course of his life will generally be spent in the midst of the first group, while he has only incidental relations with the "relatives." of the second group. It is from the first that he receives his clan affiliation. The fundamental relations of paternal kinship are governed,

612 as we have maintained, in terms of filiation – the term émɔ̀,
601 with a qualifying word indicating the filiation: thus émɔ̀ wam, my son – and in terms of "fraternity," the term mwanö indicating the descendants found in the same segment. From these two co-ordinates, some of the relationships can be represented as follows:

Table VI

| Generations | Designations in the vertical direction | Designations in the horizontal direction |
|---|---|---|
| X | Mvam (sg) | |
| I | Mvam (sg) | |
| II | Esa (sg) | |
| III | Mwanö (sg) | Bobéñâg (pl) |
| IV | Bèndè (pl) | Bobéñâg (pl) |
| V | Nwabâg (col) | Bobézǎ̂g (pl) |
| Y | Nwagbâg (col) | Mwan'ayôg (sg) |

Abbreviations: sg, singular; pl, plural; col, collective.

In the first place it seems that the word mvam, used specifically for the grandfather and the forefather, has a very general meaning. It is applied to the great-uncle and to both the ancestor of the direct line of descent and those of the collateral lines. According to Trilles mvam "is derived from a root va, which implies not the idea of a generation, which is sa or ba, 'to plant,' but of production, increase, growth. . . ." (1) The mvam, living or dead

1. Father H. Trilles, op. cit., p. 88.

who may be at the same time ancestors and guardian beings, constitute in an indistinct way the ngibâg, or ancestry. This voluntary
612 confusion of terminology, being a sort of throwback into the past
601 in the defunct part of the clan grouping, should be connected with
888 the Fang custom of keeping the old men away from public life and reducing them to a sort of marginal life. (2) In the same way,

2. Ibid., p. 106, "The white-haired old

612
601
[888]

> man is rarely esteemed in the Fang country. As soon as he no longer has the strength to carry a gun, he receives no consideration, and of his own accord he adapts himself to this role, joking and playing at every turn."

the fourth generation assures [115] the passage into the midst of the confused grouping called nwabâg, which, while specifically designating the great-grandchildren, also signifies progeny, the whole of the descendants related in an unspecified way, who are to one another mwanézâg (plural, bobézâg), a term that could be translated as "brother of the same lineage" or simply as "relative." This passage which occurs at the first and fourth generations indicates the privileged position given to two intermediary generations, that of the ésa (father) and that of the mwanõ (son). In the case of this conquering people who rated their villages only by the number of its warriors, this fact must be linked to the importance given socially to the "man in his full strength" nyamòrò (1), — and

> 1. Ibid., p. 106, "Mur means 'personality' and the particle nya indicates the idea of plenitude or superiority, Our French word 'maître' [master] corresponds fairly well to this meaning."

to "the man who has become adult" — ékwar. On these two generations is based the framework of traditional Fang society.

On the other hand, the strong fraternity expressed by the notion of mwanénâg (2) survives only to the third generation with

> 2. Father Trilles writes that this term "indicates real kinship or filiation and not by adoption or blood brotherhood . . . ," op. cit., p. 251.

respect to a common mvam (grandfather). (3) The order of

612
601

3. An expression frequently heard during our investigations was: "They had the same mvam, therefore they belonged to the same nd'è bòt."

succession confirms this fact by retaining in the collateral lines of descent only "first cousins" and paternal nephews (émò mwaneñâg, son of mwanéñâg) of the deceased. (4) Apart from the individual

4. Cf. M. Bertaut, Le Drout coutumier des Boulous [Common Law of the Boulou], chapter, "Successions," and L. Mba, Essai de droit coutumier pahouin [Essay on Pahouin Common Law], p. 39.

family which has no independent existence, it is in relation to this kinship that the most coherent and restricted grouping of Fang society, the nd'è bòt, is organized. This assures the cohesion of such a grouping but also contributes, in quite the opposite direction, with the relaxing of effective kinship, to the cleavages which occur frequently in the fourth generation.

612
601
561
Important distinctions should be marked on the same horizontal segment. First of all in terms of sex, between brother (ndum) and sister (kal). These two terms have a very broad meaning, since, according to L. Martrou, they may mean by extension "village brother" and "daughter [or girl] of the same village." (5)

5. L. Martrou, Lexique [Lexicon].

In terms of birth, children born of the same mother (of the same womb, abum avòri) form a distinct group called abumò bòt. No privilege however is [116] granted the siblings, this qualification most frequently being specified only by a periphrase, mwanéñâg abum avòri, "brother from the same womb." Above all, in terms of seniority, the eldest, ntòl or nyamòrò, takes precedence over the younger brother, ndzimõ. This pre-eminence is fundamental and is of the same order as that which subordinates the generation

612 of mwanó to that of the ésa. The eldest son is not only almost
601 the exclusive heir to property — "he inherits at least seven tenths,"
561 writes Mr. Bertaut — but he also has religious privileges. He is the sole guardian of the skulls of ancestors, and he has political privileges, if he shows himself sufficiently able.

601 Within the maternal kinship the most important relations are
608 those between nephew (mwanö kal) and maternal uncle (nya-nduma). Of this we have proof in an early study of the Fang of the N'Djolé region, and in a recent document written at the time of a clan gathering which shows the maintenance of some of these relations. Captain Curault (1) refers to them in a precise manner in his

1. Captain Curault, "Monographie du secteur de N'Djolé au Gabon" [Monograph on the N'Djolé Sector in Gabon], Revue des Troupes Coloniales, 68, February, 1908.

monograph on the N'Djolé sector: "The relations between uncle and nephew are very close; during his life the nephew gives his uncle a great many presents to increase still further the price paid to his uncle for his mother. In the same way, whenever his nephew pays him a visit, the uncle kills a chicken for him, etc... as does the father-in-law for his son-in-law. ... If a poor nephew needs goods to pay for a palaver or to get married, he can go to his uncle, sure that he will receive help from him, even if he has not often given him presents. It is a supreme shame for a man
[428] to send away the son of his sister with empty hands." Maternal uncle and nephew have a share in the inheritance. An official report of the clan gathering of the Yémisèm-Éba still provides in 1948 for the "indemnity" due at the time of the death of a nya-nduma (a sum corresponding to the value of a woman and a sheep) and on the death of a mwanö-kal (a slightly smaller sum, "varying according to the size of the inheritance," and a sheep). (2)

2. Réunion de 25 villages de la tribu Yémissem a Afénane (District d'Oyem) du 12 an 19 Juillet, 1948 [Gathering of 25 villages of the Yémissem tribe at

601
608 Afénane (Oyem District) from July 12-19, 1948], Archives d'Oyem.

The relation between the mwanö-kal and the nya-nduma is about the same as that between son-in-law and father-in-law.

583
608 Such an assembly of facts is understandable only in terms of the Fang principle regulating the circulation of bride prices. "The brother marries with his sister's bride price," nduma a luù nö biki kal. Within such a circuit, the establishment of a couple concerns not only [117] the two partners but also the sister of the husband who has indirectly "provided" the bride price making the marriage possible, and the brother of the wife who has indirectly "recovered" this same bride price in order to get married. This explains the bonds existing between the maternal [sic] nephew and
[601] uncle and also the rights which the paternal aunt (sôna) has, according to Curault, "over her brother's children, since it is thanks to the price of her sale that her brother was able to get married and consequently have children." In exceptional circumstances
608 614 this relationship is sufficiently active to allow the nephew to settle in the midst of the family grouping of the maternal uncle or of the husband of the paternal aunt. We have had occasion to observe the first case, which involved a change of clan affiliation. A man of Yèngwi birth left his grouping following a death of which he was suspected; having joined his maternal uncle with whom he settled down to live, where he was considered as an Esabâg (he was said to be ñna ayôg, entered into the clan).

601 The kinship terms in the Fang system are applied not only to a specific class of individuals but are often used in an extended manner. Ngwé may designate any maternal relative. Nya-nduma (literally, the mother's brother) is applied to certain maternal male relatives: maternal grandfather and his brothers, maternal uncles and their descendants (1), in fact, to all the men belonging

1. Cf. L. Mba, op. cit., pp. 32 and 41.

to the nd'è bot of the maternal grandfather. Mwanö-kal implies

601 kinship with descent through the women, i.e., through paternal aunts (the term sôna having a descriptive equivalent, kal ésuò, father's sister), maternal aunts (to whom is applied symmetrically the term sôna), and sisters (kal). But its meaning can be broadened to include, as Martrou states, "any child whose mother is a native of the village or the tribe." When the emphasis is on the closest kinship, in each class the term is used with the word fogo, which means "true" and which has a quality of accentuation. Thus mwanéñâg fogo would be translated "brother by the same father." While the mwanéñâg group refers essentially to paternal filiation, the mwanōkal group points to descent through sisters, and the system of distribution of bride prices. They have in a way a complementary existence and are associated with the mechanism which allows the establishment of the couple and the procreation of posterity. The one [latter] may remedy the decay of the other [former]. Curault [118] points this out by using a case already quoted: "An orphan who does not get on with his father's brothers seeks a "brother" in his maternal uncle or in the husband of his paternal aunt, or in the son of his sister, if the latter is much older than he and already the mother of full-grown men." There is therefore a recourse to be had for anyone who, as an exception, wants to escape from the authority unjustly employed by the "chief" of his nd'è bòt.

612 This account of the principal aspects of kinship shows fairly well that, while granting first place to the "paternals," Fang society also acknowledges the "maternals" by attributing important roles to them. (1) This double recognition is confirmed by the

1. M. H. Kingsley had already stressed this important fact. Cf. Travels in West Africa, London, 1897, in which she writes: "Among the Fang, kinship is recognized both on the side of the father and of the mother, and is not limited as among the Galwa by immediate sanguinity."

obligation of double exogamy. It is forbidden to marry a woman

612 belonging to the clan of the father or the mother (or belonging to a clan connected by marriage to either when the common origin is still known). We have already pointed out certain circumstances in which maternal kinship is effective. It should be remembered that this maternal kinship manifests itself from childhood on by obligating the mwanŏ kal to visit his nya-nduma(s), that it is able to receive the right of guardianship, to collect the bride price, and to benefit from an inheritance (in addition to compensation normally provided at the time of a maternal nephew's death) by substituting for a vanished paternal kinship, and that it shares along with the relatives by marriage (abè) in the various phases of funeral ceremonies and mourning. This fact suggests that the power of the maternal kinship, while remaining subordinate, is recognized in this way to strengthen the power of "alliances" created by marriage. Those related to the father by marriage are the nya-nduma of his immediate descendants. In this way the bonds essential to the existence of traditional Fang society are consolidated.

Marriage and Alliances

581 554 The first explorers, Du Chaillu and M. H. Kingsley, did not fail to point out the important role of relations set up by means of the numerous marriages among foreign groupings. Father Trilles, in his study made at the beginning of this century, also pointed out the personal advantages connected with a network [119] of alliances opened up through the interplay of marriages. He writes: "The Fang will therefore marry a girl in order to secure alliances in other tribes, to acquire greater influence by having more men attached to him by the ties of blood." (1) All researchers emphasize definitely

1. Father Trilles, "Proverbes, légendes et contes Fang [Fang Sayings, Legends and Tales]," Bulletin de la Société Neuchâteloise de Géographie, 1905, pp. 49-295.

two social consequences of marriage: the increase of personal prestige and the increase of the strength of the family group.

581 554 These facts should be complemented by specifying the particular 562 value attributed by every Fang to the "possession" of several wives

581 and by recalling the keen competition for women this society. This
554 value was expressed in a colorful way by Dr. Cureau when he said:
562 "The gynaeceum is a bank, a savings bank...." (2) And M. L. Mba,

2. Dr. A. Cureau, op. cit., p. 118.

a Fang of the Libreville region, in his Coutumier Pahouin [Pahuin Customs] gives a similar interpretation: the wife "is part of the property (or bioum) of the group into which she enters by marriage." [837] He completes this interpretation by saying that the adultery of a married woman "is severely punished because it is considered a theft." (3) The woman has no juridical personality: she has no

3. In the same vein, we cite a remark, quoted by Mgr. Martrou in a study dated 1918, made by a young Fang of Libreville to his wife: "What do you have to complain of, you are my beast ... I paid a high enough price for you!"

personal property of any importance, merely goods for everyday use; she has no share in any inheritance; she is transmitted by inheritance, just as are various goods and valuables (which may be considered virtually as women). However, the woman is property of a special kind; she is property in the highest sense of the word: creative capital. [She is the] source of produce (by her agricultural function, all the more important now that the woman takes part in cultivating the rich plantations) and of service (by her various domestic functions). [She is the] source of power, by "the procreation of children contributing to the defense of the group or securing alliances," (4) and [she is the source] of personal prestige.

4. L. Mba, op. cit., p. 29.

[She is the] source of "alliances" and kinship; through her the number of people who exchange services and gifts and who can render aid and assistance is increased. Thus, marriage has a

581 specific social meaning; it creates bonds (abè) which fasten together
554 the family and clan groupings. Curault points out that this imposes
562 a "close union, in spite of divergencies in language and in spite of the palavers of the different parts of the Pahouin people." At the same time, marriage [120] has a personal meaning. In traditional
[556] Fang society the possession of many wives is the principal sign of wealth and the condition for all increase of wealth. This wealth conditions the importance of the social role; it makes possible the acquisition of a kind of personal power in a society with hardly any hierarchical system. (1)

1. Let us point out that two words with the same root, éval and évala, mean "polygamy" and "a prop, a support," respectively.

836 Because of this personal element the competition for women can become particularly keen. Very early, government reports pointed out the frequency of palavers due to the "women question," and they continue to complain of them as being characteristic of "Fang society and psychology." Let us state at the outset that the competition does not concern the sexual services demanded from the woman. For the unmarried men there are various compensating possibilities -- but only in the line of "lustful sexuality," to quote the expression of R. Bastide. (2) The young unmarried people have

2. R. Bastide, Sociologie et Psychanalyse [Sociology and Psychoanalysis], Bibliothèque de Sociologie Contemporaine, Paris, 1950.

complete sexual liberty among themselves: it is the custom called azòya-angòn (azòya, fornication; ngòn, maiden). E. Trezenem states in his monograph on the Fang of the Ogooué that "virginity of the woman is considered of no importance," that "the young
836 girls are free to give themselves to whomever they want." Then
584 he adds an "important restriction," saying that there are practically

836 no young girls, the little girls being married very early by their
584 parents, sometimes even before their birth." (3) This restriction

3. E. Trezenem, "Notes éthnographiques [Ethnographical Notes]," op. cit., p. 87.

is entirely relative, for, according to L. Mba, "the custom allows the betrothed to have as many lovers as she wants during the time of her engagement." M. Bertaut specifies similarly that "the young girl is free as far as her body is concerned so long as she has no husband," which may represent a long period of freedom, considering the time it takes to settle a bride price that is always very large. There exists also a kind of tolerated, it not established,
837 prostitution, since the husband may "place one of his wives under
[548] obligation to bring him some income by prostituting herself to strangers." (4) Certain customs, such as the placing of a wife at

4. L. Mba, op. cit., p. 29; and V. Largeau, Encyclopédie Pahouine [Pahuin Encyclopedia], article on adultery": ... "a husband is always free to lend his wife on condition of a certain payment... ."

the disposal of a guest, or the lending or [121] exchanging of a wife (1) as a token of friendship (the wife becoming munõgo ânôm,

1. Cf. V. Largeau, op. cit.:" ... the rules of good hospitality require the host to put one of his wives at the disposal of the one whom he is entertaining. On the other hand, it is a current custom for two good neighbors who respect each other to exchange wives from time to time, and this is a definite indication of mutual sympathy." Also, Captain Maignan,

837

"Etudes sur le Pays Pahouin [Study on the Pahouin Country]," op. cit.

"friendship wife"), show, as does the freedom just referred to, that the curbing of adultery can be explained by social reasons which are quite alien to sexuality.

[727 567] 831 595 581 The possibility of raping women of neighboring people during the time of conquest, the possibility of buying foreign women at a good price, so long as the slave trade lasted, permitted the "chiefs" of groupings to remedy the dangers due to the unsatisfied desires of the young men. Apparently the Fang do not display, as do some people, (2) signs of unsatisfied sex due to the fact that

2. Cf. R. Bastide, Sociologie et Psychanalyse [Sociology and Psychoanalysis], pp. 160-161.

women remain the property of the older men. What is sought is the legal possession of the woman, let us say, for the many advantages it entails, rather than sexual possession. And in this sense the justification brought forward by L. Mba can be understood when he writes, "It was not material satisfaction of the senses which drove the Pahouins to polygamy, but many other reasons. . . ."

581 562 684 628 When the marriage is consummated, the woman goes from a state of near liberty to one of strict sexual control. The specific painful physical penalties for adultery to which the woman alone is subject are particularly severe: being exposed naked before the assembled village, being tied to the ant tree, excision of the clitoris or pimento torture, various mutilations. When the woman, either by flight or by rape, leaves the grouping into which she married, the whole group reacts violently. It is the cause of fights, kidnaping, and pillaging of the village that has taken her 581 562 in. (3) There is the most absolute contrast between this control

3. "Hence, conflicts that last for years, expressed through kidnaping of women and ending in gunshots," Libreville, Archives of 1909. And

581
562

> the saying: "If the woman is the receptacle in which all can quench their thirst, she should not be carried off."

between these collective sanctions, and the very broad morality which allows a girl to "celebrate her youth" and which appears in the proverb: "Woman is an ear of dry corn in which anyone with teeth may bite." Marriage strengthens the socialization of woman, imposing on her [122] unconditional submission. One might say, to quote R. Bastide, that it consists in passing from "lustful sexuality" to "social sexuality."

581
585
The social character of marriage is emphasized symbolically. A series of ceremonies mark the admission of the woman into the group that is receiving her. The mother of her husband recites the latter's genealogy, and a segregation of a week is imposed on her, after which she undergoes a coming-out ritual — she is bathed and anointed with oil by the oldest woman relative -- [551] and she receives a new name, indicating a wish, which the other women give to her at a time of song and dance. (1) The "alliance"

1. Cf. E. Trezenem, op. cit., p. 89.

concluded between the two family groupings is demonstrated by meals taken together and by rejoicing (éyalö), and above all, it is [769] consecrated by the sacrifice of an animal destined for the biéri (ancestors' altar) of the young girl's parents, showing that bonds exist not only with the group of living but also with the community of ancestors. (2) The emphasis is thus laid on taking possession of

> 2. No doubt it is necessary to link this sacred character of the alliance to the violence of collective reactions provoked by "women affairs."

the posterity (in this respect the recitation of the genealogy appears to be very significant) and on the creation of an alliance (the same

581 word abè meaning both the bond and those joined) imposing peace
585 and mutual assistance. In this way the two essential functions of the woman are revealed: she is an element of fecundity and a maker of peace and assistance. These are the elements on which traditional Fang society is based. Hence it is easy to understand the control exercised by the group by restricting freedom of choice of a spouse – through the medium of the head of the family, it seeks the alliance which will be of greatest advantage to it (3) – and by

> 3. Cf. L. Mba, op. cit., "In the past the opinion of the interested parties mattered little. The request is made by the head of one family to the head of another family."

intervening when the flight or rape of the woman would compromise the equilibrium brought about by the marriage.

583 The method itself of marriage marks the development of a
584 series of exchanges between the two family groups it unites. With the first phase known as the "betrothal," dzâga, the young man acquires pre-eminence over the chosen girl. He has the right to live with her for several days, but his family must provide the "fiancée's"parents with the first presents and must lend assistance at the time of various undertakings (clearing undergrowth, building huts, hunting [123] or fishing expeditions). During this period the girl's father determines the amount of the bride price, "nswa. The second period corresponds to the payment of this bride price, which may be made at intervals, provided that the first payment be the largest. This often gives rise to arguments and palavers. On the other hand, the nkia ("he who has received the bride price") is obliged to bring compensation in the form of gifts, usually of animals, which are called mévalö. Finally, the third phase corresponds to the "handing over of the fiancée" and to her settlement in the midst of the family grouping of the young man. It involves the ceremony we have described. The woman, according to Largeau, becomes truly the wife (mônõga), and not merely the concubine, from the moment when she is able to cook for her husband after

5: Balandier--64 E-5 (1946-1951) 1955 FH9 Fang FH9

583 "her mother has come and prepared with her the first meal." (1)
584

1. V. Largeau, op. cit., article: Épouser [Getting Married].

This final ceremony, as M. Leenhardt has noted in other areas, has the character of a "communal manducation"; (2) it concludes a

2. M. Leenhardt, "Cérémonie et sceau du mariage [Ceremony and Seal of Marriage]," Le Monde Non Chrétien, 15, 1950.

phase in which the ties born of reciprocity are strengthened by an intimate communion between the members of the allied groupings. Afterwards the exchanges continue in the form of visits, assistance, and reciprocal gifts, particularly at the birth of children, when the husband is obliged to give presents to his family-in-law. This reciprocity must have been more direct in olden times, for some Fang can remember when marriages were made by exchanging wives. A young Pahouin author, F. Meyé, writes that "cases of such marriages (called "bikour mêngong") are known "but are very rare. (3) In spite of the medium of the bride price, this reciprocity

3. Cf. François Méyé, "Pour la Jeunesse Fang [For Fang Youth], Journal A.E.F., July 25, 1948.

is manifested in a nonequivocal manner. The interminable process it involves, which led Dr. Cureau to compare the family-in-law to innumerable leeches, (4) nevertheless guarantees the durability

4. And to write: "There are ceaseless demands under the most bizarre pretexts, the fiancée's first menses, first conjugal cohabitation, first signs of pregnancy, childbirth ..." in Sociétés primitives, p. 117.

583 of the alliance. (5)
584

5. Cf., on the importance of these facts of reciprocity and their role in so-called primitive societies, the remarkable work of C. Levi-Strauss devoted to the study of Structures élémentaires de la Parenté [Elementary Structures of Kinship], Paris, 1949.

581 As it circulates, the bride price weaves a network of ties
583 between groupings which, without the obligation of exogamy, would
578 have lived as so many biological, economic, and political units
595 retired within themselves. [124] It compels co-operation; it creates zones of security in a country where, at a time of conquest, the economic competition is severe (as regards the best land for cultivation and hunting, and the trade centers and roads). In addition the double exogamy multiplies these abé bonds, and the specific recognition of the maternal kinship reinforces, as we have suggested, these bonds, The circulation of women and in a parallel direction that of the bride prices have to be minutely regulated. This function belongs to the head of the nd'è bòt, to the ntòl, the latter signifying not only "ancient" but also "arbiter, envoy, ambassador." He is custodian of wealth and giver of women. At the level of the segment of brothers (bobèñâg), the principle that bride prices received at the time of the marriage of daughters are used to marry the sons in the order of their birth is completed by the obligation of the eldest brother to contribute to the formation of a bride price necessary for the marriage of the younger brother who does not benefit by such a compensation. Certainly this principle which was meant to regulate the distribution of the women and to limit competition has not turned out to be infallible. Antagonisms between the "eldest" [brothers] and younger brothers leading to the breaking up of groupings are often explained by this obligation not being met. (1) The oldest men can take advantage of their pre-

1. Cf. supra, pp. 112-113.

eminence in order to buy up the greatest number of wives. Finally,

581 the younger brothers are often tempted to collect for themselves
583 the elements of a bride price or to carry out rapes or raids. They
578 represent the most dynamic and mobile fraction of the grouping. (2)
595

2. Probably their lineages represent the major part of the Fang population of Lower Gabon. This would help to explain, apart from "modernist" reasons, the more or less pronounced rivalry and antagonisms between the "Fang from above" and the "Fang from below."

However, the earliest observations show that there was a sort of limited polygamy. Fourneau writes: "The Pahouin is in fact most often monogamous, simply because the woman is very highly prices," (3) and Dr. Cureau more specifically states: "Among the

3. A. Fourneau, op. cit., p. 77.

Fang where a wife is expensive, the maximum rarely goes above five; apparently thirty years ago, only the very rich could rise to one or two units above humiliating monogamy." (4) These two

4. Dr. A. Cureau, op. cit., p. 119.

authors confirm the existence of a restricted polygamy and therefore of a tendency to equalize the distribution of the women which, according to them, is allied with the high cost of bride prices.

583 [125] It is now time to analyze the material nature of the bride price. During the nineteenth century it consisted essentially of iron objects (representations of assagais, Pahouin knives, and axes very reduced in size), of which the bikki are the best known, (1)

1. Cf. M. H. Kingsley, op. cit.; the ancient word for bride price is bikki, or nswa bikki.

reserved exclusively for matrimonial exchanges, and of animals,

583 ivory, and salt. With the growing development of trade, imported "goods" took the place in part of these symbolic objects, and the explorer Du Chaillu about 1860 notes "an ever increasing desire" for these articles. (2) Then, until 1918-20, the bride price consisted essentially of symbolic money and "goods" of high value. It has only been since that date that currency is used and represents an increasingly large proportion of the bride price. This evolution must be looked upon in the first place as a desire to maintain as the equivalent of woman, who is wealth in the highest sense of the word, the most valuable property which Fang society has at its disposal. The society endeavors to have the bride price consist of scarce products: that is, bikki, "goods," in the period of trading; currency when the latter became widespread and accepted by the villagers. This corresponds originally less to a notion of high price — the notion of price only slowly supplanting that of exchange — than to the desire to establish a restricted circuit in which only the heads of family groupings would participate, that is, a circuit controlled to the maximum. (3) Under these conditions polygamy, which was not

2. Stating in another connection: "... copper rings, white beads, and copper dishes called "neptunes" have the highest current value among the Fang for the purchase of a wife...," cf. Voyages et Aventures dans l'Afriques Equatoriale [Travels and Adventures in Equatorial Africa].

3. The effectiveness of this control is pointed out in a study, Le Mariage Fang [Fang Marriage] appearing in the Archives of Oyem": Formerly the authority of the head of the family was very great and often he made use of family solidarity to allow the poorest to marry each other and to obtain a just distribution of the women."

583 common, appears as the sign of exceptional success, which explains the prestige of the nkukuma who owns a greater number of wives and more property (bium). The price characteristic manifested now in the bride price is a recent transformation. Originally, its final payment sealed an alliance that could not be broken without a long process of "divorce"; one which survived even the man who enabled it to be, since the wife was transferred to the eldest son or the oldest brother; and one which, above all, legitimized the ownership of posterity: if the bride price was not paid in full, the newborn child belonged to the parents of the wife; if not fully paid back [126] at the time of a "divorce," the child belonged to the father. The fact that the bride price is not refunded at the death of the wife, when the latter leaves posterity, does not suggest that it is a matter of the price of the latter, but rather a reciprocity emphasizing that through the posterity the alliance has become a kinship.

562 584 We have thus endeavored to show the social importance of marriage, pointing out particularly the fundamental role of the links it establishes between groups and the pre-eminence attached to controlling the circulation of the women and their bride prices. But obviously this system does not always function smoothly. A lack of equilibrium exists between the meaning it has for the grouping and the meaning it might have for the individuals concerned. Certain rules of procedure, recognized by custom, provide solutions for possible conflicts. The marriage agreed to by the young people may take place against the wish of the family heads follow-
[839] ing the rape (abòm) of the girl (1); the wife has various methods

1. Cf. E. Trezenem, op. cit., p. 88: "The young man gives what he has in money and goods, and the parents are obliged to agree to the marriage by accepting this first payment."

of recourse against a seriously prejudicial union. Her complaint may result in her marriage to another of the sons of her father-in-law, or else she may go to a man of her choice who pays the

562 584 compensation, or she may "publicly curse her husband." (2)

2. Cf. V. Largeau, op. cit., article: Femme [Woman].

562 586 Finally, in the case of serious conflicts, the union may be dissolved by "divorce," but the latter may only be used traditionally under well-defined circumstances and "with the assent of the two interested family heads." (3) There are therefore arrangements that allow

3. L. Mba, op. cit., p. 21.

personal reasons to be taken into account and which F. Meyé had in mind when he said, "the Fang woman can in no way be compared to a slave," because of the many kinds of recourse she has at her disposal; these arrangements play a wholly exceptional role in ancient Fang society. Beside the personal element, which also acts as a disturbing element, is the fact that the number of unions indicates wealth and social importance. (4) It results, when the

4. This element is shown particularly in the custom reported by L. Mba: "In comfortably off families, the parents betroth the boys before puberty and the girls after puberty," op. cit., p. 14.

circulation of goods is no longer strictly controlled, in keen competition and numerous disputes.

582 835 It is now essential to consider the persons concerned in the play of marriage and to point out at once that certain persons [127] are excluded from it. Apart from the double exogamy which introduces a form of "fraternity" in a very broad sense of the word, there are prohibitions concerning the precise degrees of relationship as follows: between members of the taġa class (father, mother, uncle, aunt) and the mwanõ class (sons and daughters, nephews and nieces); between members of the same segment, including cousins to the third generation; there are prohibitions on those

582 related by marriage: between a man and "any woman, even
835 divorced, of his kinship by marriage," between "members of the son-in-law's family" and any woman divorced from the kinship by marriage. (1) There are also prohibitions relating to the

1. Cf. L. Mba, op. cit., p. 17.

"adopted" (ntobō). It seems important to us to state that these various interdicts exclude from marriage persons between whom there are already very definite relations, those due to effective kinship (including "cousins" to the level where the nd'è bòt is most often split into separate elements), those that exist between groupings already related by marriage, and those which arise from the state known as "adoption." Everything takes place as
[60] if the aim sought by means of marriage was to impose an alliance on the most foreign elements — foreign and hostile being considered as synonymous during the period of conquest. (2) The

2: Cf. E. Trezenem, op. cit., pp. 91-92: "Relations with foreign tribes are rare ... the foreigner is accepted with reserve and only when he shows merchandise proving that his visit has no other purpose than to fetch a woman whom he can marry. The tribes are very frequently hostile to one another..."

obligation to respect both double exogamy and the above-mentioned interdicts contributes essentially to broadening among the groupings the field of relations based on co-operation. Incest,
835 783 an infraction of these principles, enters into the category of the nsem defined by Martrou as "ritual impurity, moral defilement." It brings about sterility or illness and arouses in traditional society a collective reaction. V. Largeau in his work mentions the process of expiation (3) in use at that time with the intervention of the

3. Op. cit., article: Inceste [Incest].

835
783 "men's society" and the rite allied to the makuma dance characteristic of this society.

Marriage creates the so-called "restricted" or "individual" family. This has no special name and represents the smallest grouping in which communal life takes place. The husband and wife are nomõ and nga to each other — these two terms stressing the biological character of the union since they also signify male and female. His parents-in-law are minki [128] or nkia, "he who has received the bride price," a word recalling the seal that has validated the union. In the same way the term mbòm, meaning "newly married woman whose bride price has just been paid," is used to designate the daughter-in-law, and has the same context. The principle already mentioned of the pre-eminence attached to seniority subsists in the relations with the abè. For the husband the wife's eldest sister is mînki (mother-in-law) while the younger sister is ngòm zam (my daughter). On a similar pre-eminence is based the authority of the first wife over the other wives; while the former is nanõ (mother) the others are mbòm (daughter-in-law) — which explains her role of directing the various jobs and moral responsibilities entrusted to her. Finally, the personal element at the level of these relations is perfectly symbolized by the position accorded to the preferred wife (nluga or ntômba). This astonished one of the first administrators of the Fang country, who wrote: "While they usually profess great indifference toward their wives and have no scruples over renting or lending them out, they have a rather keen affection for the companion whom they choose as 'favorite.'" (1) This is the least socialized part and manifests relations that have a certain spontaneity between the two elements associated by marriage.

1. Archives for the Year 1905, Libreville.

## Residential Units

621 The colonial government has acknowledged only a "collection" of villages in the Fang country, giving this name to the

621 groupings, whatever their size, settled in a definite spot and occupying a limited area. Referring to observations made in the past, the Fang apparently distinguished definitely two types of these units: the ẓal, "inhabited only by the family of the ésa (chief or patriarch) his kin and his clients [dependents]" and the mfaġ, "where several families gather together without mingling together . . . ," the different parts being "separated by guardhouses built in the center of the single street. . . ." (2) It is easy to see

2. V. Largeau, op. cit., article: Village.

by this statement that the nd'è bòt (minor lineage) formed the fundamental element, as is seen by sections or quarters definitely marked out. The numerous concentrations were most often conditioned by reasons of security (they were mostly found on the frontiers [129] of the Fang country at the period of conquest) or by the power of aggregation of a strong personality. (1) They repre-

1. Maignan in his Études sur le Pays Pahouin [Studies of the Pahouin Country], op. cit., refers to such a power held by "him who, by his age, his experience, his eloquence, his wealth . . . is the most capable of protecting the interests of all."

sented more or less extended lineages. L. Martrou points out that all the members of these villages "go back through four or five ancestors to a common paternal founder." (2)

2. Father L. Martrou, "Le nomadisme des Fangs [Nomadism of the Fangs]," Revue de Géographie, Vol. 3, 1909.

621 166 Early works and documents show the village grouping to be an eminently mobile unit. Father Trilles gives the example of a village

621 166 that accomplished a migration of 500 kilometers with the same chief (1910), and Dr. Aujoulat mentions a grouping which in twenty years moved over 200 kilometers (1935). These are characteristics of a seminomadic people and not of a peasant people. For a long time the government ran up against what it called the "migratory mania" of the Fang. The law in Gabon manifests a lack of attachment to cultivated land which underlines this instability. L. Martrou points out that there is no definite appropriation of the places for cultivation, hunting, or fishing; there exist only "zones of influence" with uncertain boundaries. (3)

3. Father L. Martrou, "Le nomadisme des Fangs [Nomadism of the Fangs]," op. cit.

166 The geographer, J. Bruhnes, basing his judgment on these facts, made of the Fang a type of Naturvoelker [nature folk] and claimed that "the most general causes of the migrations... resulted from destructive occupation." (4) It is essential to correct

4. J. Bruhnes, La Geographie Humaine [Human Geography], abridged edition, Paris, 1942, pp. 199-204.

here an opinion based on insufficient information, which will lead us to observations valuable for our analysis. At various times we have specifically stated that there exist some Fang centers settled a long time ago in a limited region (in Woleu-N'tem). (5) We

5. Confirmed by Captain Maignan, op. cit., who draws attention to villages "occupying the same land for more than a century," (study dated 1912).

have shown how echeloning took place, starting from regular "migratory centers," and have indicated the manner in which the

166 social organization favored (or gave rise to) the breaking up of groupings. These facts lead to the idea of relative instability and to the recognition of internal causes responsible for this instability.

Moreover, recent geographic studies assert that the "system of agriculture adopted by the Fang (could not by) the destruction of the forest, [130] (determine) the displacement of a whole population," These studies recall the existence of a "true and early settlement" in the heart of the Fang country in the South Cameroons.(1) This is certified by the existence of landed property

1. G. Sautter, "Les paysans noirs du Gabon septentrional" [The Black Peasants of Northern Gabon], op. cit., pp. 126-128, 158.

among the Cameroons Pahoun. (2) The migrations through Gabon

2. Cf. M. Bertaut, op. cit., chapter: Les Biens [Property].

must be the most recent (representing no doubt the point of departure of a new phase of expansionism), and the Ogooué represents the frontier of the Fang country (actually the advanced front of this people) only because of French occupation. The Fang have only recently given up a policy of conquest at which they excelled because of their fighting valor and their assimilating capacity. Until the eve of 1914 the administration ran up against warlike organizations, the Bizima, operating in the neighborhood of the Okamo River, and a report of 1922 specifically states that "the native is not easily handled." There is no doubt that for a long time the Fang have made every effort to secure and control the trade routes and trading centers early established in this part of central Africa. This is confirmed by legends which connect a trek toward the west with the discovery of great riches. (3) As

3. Cf. Legends quoted by L. Mba, op. cit., and V. Largeau, op. cit.

166 early as the middle of the last century the explorer Du Chaillu noted how this warlike pressure was completed by peaceful conquest by means of "alliances" created by marriage with foreighers. (4) Dr. Cureau, fifty years later, pointed out that the

> 4. Father Du Chaillu, op. cit., "... for their part the Fang, far away from the European commerce much coveted by them, are happy to acquire a son-in-law nearer the coast. So I suspect that in a few years they will succeed in contracting marriages with other tribes on a very large scale."

control of the Ogooué trade had passed into the hands of the Fang peoples. (5) With settlement in Gabon, the economy of the Fang

> 5. Dr. A. Cureau, op. cit., p. 294.

groupings takes on a double orientation: it comes in contact with the forest peoples who are essentially hunters and collectors of trading produce, and it transforms its movement of expansion into an attempt to seize the trade of Lower Gabon. One might say that French colonization has prevented a sort of Fang colonization in this region. While this double task of conquest and trade depends on the [143] men, the economy of subsistence is to all intents and purposes left to the women. On this basis [131] the division of labor is established, leaving to the men alone the means of acquiring wealth and capital.

166 621 361 Such elements help us to understand the relative mobility of the groupings. A people that has no concern for agriculture would have no strong attachment for land that is equally fertile in any part of the forest. (1) In another respect the characteristic of a

> 1. See what was still said in 1934 by the administrator Le Testu (one of the best observers of the men and the country): "Lacking any taste for working the

166
621
361

land, which the Pahouin will never acquire, for he considers it humiliating, he will perhaps develop a taste for the profit resulting from this work."

conquering society has imposed on the old Fang village an appearance which has often been mentioned: two uninterrupted rows (nkara) of huts surrounding a kind of courtyard closed at each end [712] by a "guardhouse" (abẽnõ); sometimes a palisade of posts enclosing a banana plantation serves as a protection in the rear. Inside the huts there is only a limited amount of things which are easily [352] transportable: "goods" of value are stored in chests, the ancestors' altars (biẽri) are kept in large cylindrical boxes. (2) There is no

2. Very similar to the "baskets of ancestors" carried by the Ba-kongo during their great migrations.

doubt that the grouping lived for a long time in a state of insecurity. This was primarily the factor which intervened to maintain a minimum size without which there was no real security. The causes contributing to the breaking up of groups, the organization of Fang society itself, the search for women and goods, and, finally, the agricultural methods, were dominated and largely impeded by this necessity. It appears certain that really large villages existed at the beginning of French occupation. V. Largeau refers to mfaġ with eight or ten "guardhouses"; F. Grébert speaks of ten to twenty of these "guardhouses," (3) and F. Meyé asserts

3. F. Grébert. Au Gabon [In the Gabon], Paris, 1932.

that "the normal population of a village was from 80 to 170 warriors, exclusive of women and adolescents." (4) According to estimates

4. Quoted by G. Sautter, op. cit., p. 124.

166 made fifty years ago, such a whole represented from 350 to 700
621 or 800 persons — while present-day villages rarely average more
361 than 100 inhabitants. With peace restored, the grouping has relaxed and divided into its constituent elements which have broken away to form neighboring hamlets. A special word, ngòra, is the name given to these hamlets which are considered as still forming the same whole.

621 Linked with the virile character of Fang society is certainly
562 [132] the accent on the separation of sexes as shown in daily
571 life. For the woman, the living place is the hut; for the man it
344 is essentially the "guardhouse." M. H. Kingsley writes: "The men spend most of their time in palaver houses built at each end of the street, while the women bring bowls of food the whole day
[784] long," (3) without being able to enter the abèñõ, which is absolutely

3. Travels in West Africa, p. 1154.

forbidden them. H. Trilles defines this abèñõ as the place "where the men assemble to deal with community affairs, war, marriage,
[574] lawsuits, etc...," and where strangers are welcomed. In addition it is the place where the young men receive a large part of their education, where they learn, according to L. Mba, the most im-
621 portant interdicts (éki). Males of the same nd'è bòt assemble in
562 the abèñõ, which forms a virile grouping and one of kinship. In
571 its midst the authority of the "eldest" is expressed. He is both the symbol and the regulator of the life of the group, and the intermediary between it and the ancestors. Here not only are important transactions regulated, but work is also organized. The life of each one is subject to the control and the nearly constant censure of all. In it is created a cohesion so that this group is the most resistant element of Fang society. It is through the medium of this group, that the traditional Fang is assessed, is isolated as an individual, by the foreigner; he is not known in the first place as X but as a man attached to the abèñõ of Y. Such a grouping therefore represents a strong "community": the fusion, which favors effective kinship to the maximum (it is based on immediate filiation and "fraternity"), worship of the same ancestors, and joint

621 participation in the same tasks, tends — if one may venture the
562 play on words — to the confusion of its members. On the other
571 hand, the women it controls do not form such a coherent whole; they represent different clans, different modalities of kinship; they are the center of virtual conflicts (between female "relatives" and female "relations by marriage," between co-wives); except for the wives of the same man, who live together, they do not have a common living place.

621 The nd'è bòt — and, more precisely, this virile whole made
571 up of relatives belonging to the same guardhouse (abèñõ) — harbors,
578 however, latent antagonisms, which are the result of the privilege
614 linked with ancestry [133] or seniority. These tensions can come to a head when disputes arise usually from economic causes, such as circulation of wealth or of women, or allocation of farming land. They help to explain the very variable size of the groupings considered as villages, and the phenomena of aggregation and disintegration of the latter according to circumstances. But both of these movements are effected as a function of the minor lineage which is the nd'è bòt.

621 This grouping may by itself constitute a separate unit of about
571 ten persons or a village with up to a hundred inhabitants. When a
614 village is old, with a large population (200 to 300 persons or more), it cannot remain organized around a single common hearth. It is arranged around several centers corresponding to the sons of the founder or their successors. Thus the village of Ebiane (Yéngwi in the vicinity of Oyem) has 235 inhabitants distributed in three groups representing the respective posterity of three brothers. We have already stressed the fact that the heads of minor lineages are at the level of the same segment. The village of Afénane (Yébimvé of the Oyem region) with more than 300 inhabitants also consists of the posterity of three brothers, and each of the nd'è bòt occupies a definite position on the village street, according to the following diagram:

621 571 614 The groupings are located according to the order of their pre-eminence, that of the eldest being at the back in direct contact with the chief's hut. Also, grouping 1 does not represent the whole of the lineage descended from the eldest brother (Ekòrò Ngòm); the latter divided at the level of the sons of Ekòrò Ngòm into three elements, of which one is at Afénane and the two others make up the very close villages of Messia (139 inhabitants) and M'Fagne (97 inhabitants).

621 571 578 614 This whole Yébimvé group, consisting in a limited area of nearly 1,000 persons, is interesting to the extent that it shows how the "major" lineages (which we have described above under the name of abial è bòt) and the "minor" ones determine residence in a definite zone and a village. Two brothers led a migratory group [134] of Yébimvé from the Cameroons to the territory occupied today by their posterity. A conflict arising from the unequal distribution of the women acquired from foreign villages lead to the first rupture. Each of the two brothers moved away with the group he controlled, and the memory of past antagonisms has remained sufficiently alive to prevent any attempt today at recombining the members.

621 571 614 The initial cleavage can be presented in the following manner: (Table VII on following page.)

The cleavage is expressed in relation to a common origin (A) which represents the head of the "major" lineage and gives rise to the first rupture which we mark with a double line. The two nd'è bòt have separated and settled in spite of all in adjacent regions. But these groupings have themselves been subject to new fragmentations since then. We represent the second of these where they occur [135] at the level of the third generations (after III, V, and VII), giving rise to the creation of villages very close to one another and able to co-operate and, above all, to regroup if required by circumstances.

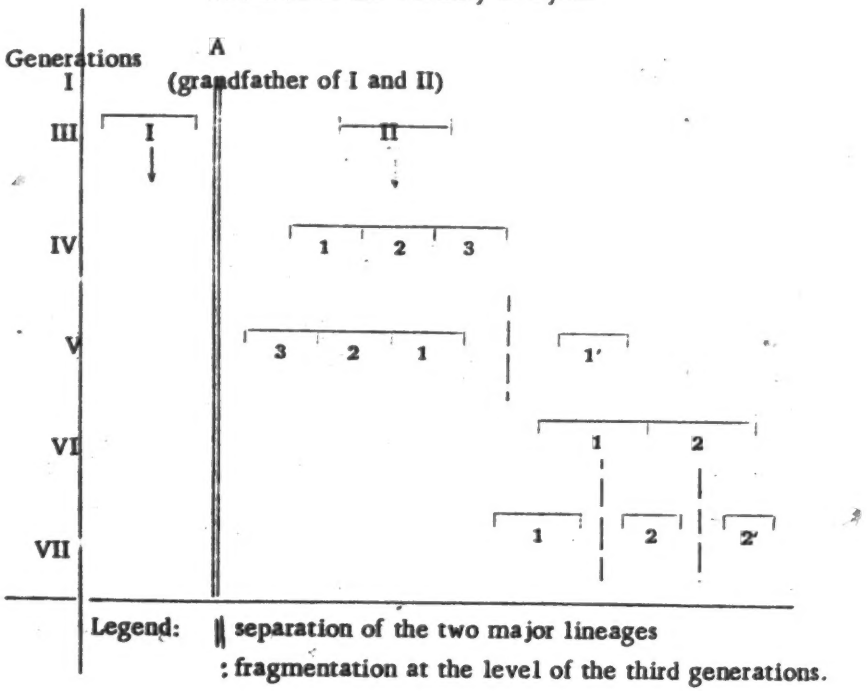
These observations show that the nd'è bòt is a true residential unit. They show how the cleavage becomes possible as soon as this unit reaches a certain size (a size, from the point of view of security and economic demands, making it viable as a separate unit); but the distance (in the sociological sense) between fragments varies

621
571
614

in terms of the circumstances which gave rise to the rupture and of the necessity to reserve eventual co-operation. The instability of the Fang village until recent times is certainly due to the nature of the old economy and to a poor capacity for disposition of land space, but also to a type of organization that does not permit (or permits badly) the control of large groupings. These have been made necessary only by lack of security.

Table VII

Yébimvé in the Vicinity of Oyem



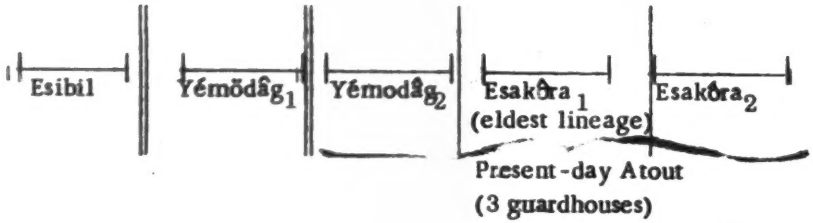

Legend: ‖ separation of the two major lineages
: fragmentation at the level of the third generations.

In the case of mixed villages where groupings belonging to different clans are found assembled together, usually following an administrative alteration of the population, instability appears to be more marked and distribution into definitely located nd'è bòt becomes a necessity. Such a grouping thus adds divisions which involves the co-existence of clan elements foreign to the

621 571 614 divisions already existing. This occurs even in the case of small villages. We give the example of Atout in Mitzic region founded by some Esibil to whom were added some Yémödâg and some Esakòra.

Table VIII

Village of Atout




Legend: ‖ definitive separation

| division into nd'è bòt making up Atout.

The founding group and a large part of the Yémödâg have already seceded; the Esakòra grouping has divided into two nd'è bòt (the "elder" and the younger), which represents a first [136] phase of the relaxing of bonds, for this division is not necessitated by the as yet reduced size of the group.

The mixed villages – called mfulana möyôg, mixture of clans – have necessitated the creation of an embroyonic form of chefferie [French administrative district]; the recognition of an authority based outside "kinship." Thus, when a fairly large grouping is concerned, the chief is careful to settle apart and to have at his disposal a guardhouse other than the one in which the members of his nd'è bòt assemble. But except for the attempts of the government to "construct" this chefferie, nothing justifies such an organization to maintain the cohesion of the village grouping it controls. The political problem – Fang society has been classed among the "anarchies" or "stateless societies" – in fact conditions

621 all future progress to the extent to which it allows (or does not allow)
571 the maintenance of sufficiently large and stable village units.
614

Political Authority and Judicial Authority

554 Taking Fang society as an example, Dr. Cureau speaks of
622 "a phenomenon of a stretching ... of the social bloc into a hierarchy based either on filiation or on intellectual and particularly moral superiority, both of which principles have their practical value according to the times." (1) He insists on a fact we have

1. Work already quoted, p. 332.

pointed out, the lack of a hierarchical organization, [with only]
[196] the simple existence of pre-eminences. The language itself gives proof of this fact by not having a special word to designate the chief, using ésa when the pre-eminence is in a way genealogical, nkuma when it is based on wealth, ẓoé (from ẓu, to say) when it justified by eloquence and the ability to command. By magnifying this statement, A. Cureau contrasts the Fang groupings with those of other peoples as being "anarchical tribes" as opposed to "organized tribes." He writes: "Authority is occasional and momentary ... Edvoughe has carried the votes in such-and-such a difficult palaver, the whole assembly obeys for a moment this ephemeral chief; tomorrow Nzokh will have succeeded Edvoughe in the leadership of opinion; here then the struggle against one and all takes place between constantly changing and constantly renewed contestants." (2)

2. Ibid., p. 326.

In a similar sense the informants of the Commission for [137]
Historical Investigation assert that the chief was "in a word the one from whom the community expected the greatest services." (1)

1. Official report of the fifth session.

In the same vein there are continual complaints from administrators incapable of reviving the powerful traditional chefferies and of acting through their medium.

554 622 769 It should be noted, however, that pre-eminence "based on filiation," as Cureau puts it, is maintained without too much difficulty – being durable while power born of events is temporary – so long as the worship of ancestors by each clan fragment remains in force. Seniority determines this pre-eminence, justified and made effective by the possession of the basket containing the ancestors' skulls. This power of the "eldest," who is at the same time "first among his equals" and priest of the biéri cult organized within the cadre of "kinship," has not however allowed the implantation of effective chefferies comparable to those based on the same principles in the Ba-kongo country (2).

2. Cf., Third part of this work.

An early government report stressed the fact that one became chief, specifying that the nyamòrò (eldest) "became chief in his zone of influence when his fairness and the effectiveness of his power were recognized." (3) Thus neither the villages nor the

3. Customs regulating the attributes of chiefs and their designation in Rapport politique du Djouah [Political Report of Djouah], 1938.

localized clan fragments, nor still less the extended clan and the tribe, reveal the existence of a true hierarchy. We see the pre-eminence of the ésa (which may only be shown by some deferential attitudes) or the provisional pre-eminence of a man who has known how to expand his "zone of influence."

554 622 [7] What are the reasons for such a situation? Taking as an example Ba-kongo, which will be studied later, one sees that the fundamental social relationship is that which exists between the ancestors (masters and guardians of the sod), the land, and the lineage; it implies necessary relations between related lineages and limits the mobility of groupings. There is nothing like this in the Fang country, where the relation with land has no such importance and the whole economy, until very recently, remained oriented toward warlike and economic conquest. Even in the

554 regions where the Fang population seems relatively old, instability
622 is the rule for a large proportion of the groupings. There is thus a sort of vicious circle: mobility imposed by long-range conquest has prevented the [138] establishment of a hierarchical organization and this "lack" results in an unrestrained instability.

The social system does not show any elements favorable to a better hierarchical organization. While the pre-eminence of the eldest is accepted, that of the eldest lineage (from which, among the Ba-kongo, the "crowned chief" is selected) is barely maintained. On the contrary, we have shown that there is a nearly constant tension between this lineage and those of the "younger"
[567] brothers. On the other hand, the absence of domestic slavery indicates the wish to prevent any development of inequality. During
[727] the entire period of great conquests the Fang have had only two solutions in relation to conquered foreigners: to destroy or to adopt. And while the eldest appears to be the regulator of the economic and political life, and to be responsible for the worship of the ancestors, his authority is subject to an effective control. It counts only within the framework of groupings of limited extent. It is open to the criticism of the men of the nd'è bòt (who consider themselves the equal of the eldest who only acts "by delegation") or of the council members when the village contains several minor lineages. It also remains in competition with occasional authorities.

If it is true that seniority almost automatically creates authority, this authority is also limited and often threatened by the principle that "the most capable" is the most influential. In the fairly large villages, the position of chief (one should rather say the regulator and intermediary with foreign groupings, which the word ntòl specifically means) is generally passed on from eldest son to eldest son (or, in default, from eldest [son] to a younger brother on the same segment) in the lineage descended from the founder. This is on condition that the successor is approved by all "for his bravery, his wealth, and his eloquence." (1) In the opposite case, a stronger

1. L. Mba, Coutumier Pahouin [Pahouin Customs], p. 12.

personality is chosen from among the eldest of another nd'è bòt in the village. In other respects this authority is controlled by a council

554 representing not simply the various minor lineages but open to
622 competitive authorities — the best warrior (éyènö), a rich man (nkuma), the cleverest at settling palavers (nté bété), not to mention the dignitaries of the "associations." In the traditional society, the possession of the biéri basket established the right of the eldest's pre-eminence and gave this right a sacred basis [139] it was a partial guarantee against the struggles for prestige. With the disappearance of this cult under the influence of the colonizers, the eldest must use the new "associations" or must make himself feared by having recourse to techniques of a magical order; otherwise he will find himself threatened as "chief" at the time of a competition which is implied by the Fang social logic.

554 The role of personal prestige appears clearly in studying the vocabulary, which has a considerable number of words or expressions applicable to the "important" or "honored" man: éguma (from gum, to honor), muramo(r) (t) and fâm ndên (from mura and ndên, great or important), nkurödi (very important man), mfum (well-known man, who has many relations), nkuma (already quoted, a man who is influential because of his wealth), etc. The authority acquired by such prestige limits the essential authority which we have shown to be dependent on seniority, but tradition also imposes strict restraints on it as well. Any pre-eminence acquired by virtue of purely personal merit is dangerous for the one who holds it, for it is essential that power, wealth, and wisdom be placed at the service of all members of the grouping.

554 Many early authors have pointed out the risk of displaying
578 an affluence and a prosperity that are not shared. Le Testu emphasizes the role played by "the fear of exciting jealousy": "Larger and more successful plantations, a better hut, wives that are more fertile, more prosperous affairs... each is a cause for jealousy, and the consequence of this feeling, as is often believed to be true, is the death of the one who excites it ...." (1) Similarly, M.

1. Le Testu, Le N'gwéna [The N'gwéna], Bulletin de la Société des Recherches Congolaises, Vol. 12, 1930.

554 Briault, an accurate observer of the Fang states that the death of
578 a chief, or an old man, or a notable person, is suspect and demands a much more "minute" enquiry than in the case of men of the common people." "Whoever has privileges is envied, whoever exerts authority makes malcontents; many chiefs have died unexpectedly; many who were envied have not made old bones; this must be fairly common since it is confirmed by proverbs (2)...."

2. M. Briault, Sur les pistes de l'A.E.F. [On the Trails of French Equatorial Africa], 1948, pp. 37-38, 42-43.

One might say that "intentional death" threatens (threatened rather, for colonial affairs and peace have allowed some to grow rich and to be protected) those who in their own interest disregard the fundamental solidarity and leveling tendency.

631 [140] By this play of forces, more or less antagonistic and varying according to circumstances, Fang society is protected from any excessive concentration of power. This explains why, in spite of its conquering military nature, it has never allowed even a rudimentary feudal system to appear. Strictly controlled, power was organized only at the level of small units — a village or a group of villages, relatives or neighbors. It has only exceptionally (and precariously) gone beyond the frontiers of these groupings, and as the "associations" have barely been able to remedy this deficiency, Fang society shows an absolute lack of centralization, which was a contributing factor in its rapid deterioration during the colonial period.

692 In a social system which leaves plenty of room for opposing relationships, cases of judicial action and conciliation play an important part. The Fang have not only established a classifica-
[673] tion of offenses — nté, simple disagreement; étôm, serious dis-
[681] pute that might result in war; and mêm, ritual infraction — and a gradation of punishments going up to holding a hostage (étéa), but have also conceived a judicial organization with

692 "arbiters" and a "jury" that has set various methods of establishing proof (including several methods of ordeal). L. Mba, in a still unpublished study, (1) points out the existence of a

1. Last part of Essai de Droit Coutumier Pahouin [Essay on Pahouin Common Law], in Rapport de la Commission Enquête Historique, Libreville, 1949.

"family tribunal" — of minor lineage — with the ntòl as peacemaker assisted by one or two members of the grouping for dealing with purely internal affairs. He also indicates the existence of a "tribunal" of major lineage that intervenes in conflicts between two or several nd'è bòt, this constituting in principle) a court of appeal, consisting of a judge (who is not necessarily the "chief" of the lineage but any peacemaker who has shown his ability) before whom the representatives of the groupings involved appear. He also points out the existence of a similarly constituted clan "tribunal," which has the same functions at the level of larger groupings and also has the role of a court of appeal. Let us add [695] that the jury (bétolö) is not selected, outside of (blood) relatives and relatives by marriage, until the day the "tribunal" meets. These are only general indications. They show, however, that it is not so much a question of organizations with a judicial function as of principles [141] assuring the regulation of infractions and conflicts by a way other than violence. The status of "judge" 693 554 does not exist with the definiteness we will find when studying the Ba-kongo; instead it displays the same weaknesses as those of the "chief's" situation. The latter may be the judge for the lineage and the clan, but he will often find himself supplanted by a true "master of palaver." In this connection ability and personal prestige are dominant to such an extent that recourse is possible to judges of foreign clans, especially in criminal matters.

692 In the matter of judiciary organization as in that of the chefferie, it appears that the framework of kinship groupings lend itself very little to a centralization of power, either political

692 or judicial. We have sufficiently stressed the diffuse character of the latter. On the other hand, certain "associations" show an organization (which is often effective outside the clan) that fills (or attempts to do so) a compensating function. This is true of the Ngil, whose role of pacification and justice extends beyond clan limits — and in spite of these limits.

6. The Associations

769 794 We have frequently pointed out the rather loose nature of the bonds which exist between even close fragments of a clan. In Gabon, because of the extreme dispersal and entanglement of the divers fragments, the "periodic gatherings" disappeared very early. No mention is made of them by early authors, except for a vague one by Father Trilles. However, these gatherings (ésulan) have been kept up in the Cameroons with the purpose of reminding the members of their solidarity and having them show it by "helping one another in kind, with money, and with days of work." (1)

1. Tradition des Yénžòk [Tradition of the Yénžòk], Archives of Ebolowa, The Cameroons.

These bonds, however, are found to be tightened at the time of the initiation of young men to the Bièri cult when the society of grown men is also strengthened. Bièri, while borrowed, according to H. Trilles, "in its form from neighboring nations" yet "remaining basically Fang," is a cult rendered to the spirits of the [778] ancestors through the agency of their skulls. It necessitates for every nd'è bòt an altar set up in the hut of the eldest, or very near it. [142] It requires sacrifices (regular and circumstantial), and it has to be consulted before every important action.

This cult confirms the continuity of the line and reveals periodically the profound unity which constitutes the continuation of the generations — at the time of sacrifices of food, the food is first "consumed" by the Bièri, then eaten by the secluded initiates (mvoma bièri) assembled in the guardhouse. It imposes a large

769 794 number of prohibitions (with regard to the uninitiated and the women) and obligations. It "separates" the initiated men, thus giving a privileged position — justified by the right to commune with the ancestors and to "see the Bièrí" — to the most active elements of Fang society.

The initiation is particularly characterized (the culminating [276] moment of the series of ceremonies) by drunkenness produced by the plant alan, (1) which may result in long-lasting unconscious-

1. Strychnos icaja.

ness.(2) The newly initiated man at this juncture becomes certain

2. E. Trezenem, op. cit., III, Le Bièri, pp. 74-76.

that he has enjoyed a revelation and from then on is in communication with the ancestors. He experiences the fervor of a communion that binds him to the whole society whose effectiveness he discovers at the same time: he has in fact become the object of predictions that are always realized. (3) He asserts himself, if we

3. Cf. idem., p. 75: "All the Pahouins whom we questioned assert that predictions made to people drunk on alan by the bièrí have always been realized.

may use the expression, as a full-fledged Fang. The Bièri cult assumes therefore the highest function of aggregation. We stress the fact that initiation is carried out in the same place for several of the nd'è bòt belonging to the same clan, thus strengthening the ties of kinship existing between closely related clan fragments, and tending to reconstitute, to make real, units larger than the individual groupings. On the other hand, initiation to this cult, [304 177] like circumcision (which takes place apart and appears to be a recent acquisition of the Fang), creates groupings of young men who belong appreciably to the same age group. It emphasizes a link between generations (the "fathers" or "eldest" being

794 [769] those who give the initiation), which is important in traditional Fang society.

The grouping that forms the Biéri – which brings together full-grown men who take an integral part in the social life – remains closely linked with the system of kinship. It has, none the less, an important role which we have just pointed out, that is, [143] it establishes relations, which are most effective because they are religious, between elements of the same clan who do not belong organically [sic] within the limits of a superior unit which might have been the chefferie. But other associations have come into existence beyond the clan kinship and beyond the diversity, peculiarities, and antagonisms it provokes. The Ngil, with a multifunctional activity and with an aim to putting things in order at the time of crises and conflicts, seems to be the best known. (1)

1. Cf. Father H. Trilles, op. cit., p. 62. Captain Maignan, op. cit. Lt. Poupard, "Le Fétichisme et la barbarie au Congo [Fetishism and Barbarism in the Congo]," Renseignements Coloniaux, March, 1908. Above all, L.C. Leroux, Etude sur le Ngil [Study on the Ngil], Bulletin de la Société des Recherches Congolaises, 6, 1925.

794 787 Members of the Ngil as such are guaranteed "in all places against attack"; they circulate "without the least fear of any outrage" among tribes that are in "open vendetta." (2) The Ngil –

2. L.C. Leroux, op. cit.

the word designates both the association and the masked man who operates in its name – "has the right to strike, wound, and even kill." The solemnity of his action is marked by the suspension of all life in the village when he arrives. The huts are closed, the fires put out, the women cloistered, and no inhabitant shows

794 himself in the interior courtyard. The final ceremony includes
787 the erection of a hollow clay statue (3) (also called Ngil) before

3. Cf. the description in the articles of Leroux, op. cit., and Poupard, op. cit.

which "all the inhabitants of the village and those of the villages of the same line" must appear, and whose function is to reveal the guilty ones (who have caused unexplained deaths or calamities from which the whole group has suffered, etc.). The intervention of the Ngil is sought in moments of serious crises. It calls for total action involving large groupings for whom it has a real therapeutic value: by determining guilt (impossible to contest because it is a matter of a superior and anonymous justice), by reinstating unity (on a passionate basis) at the time of the punishment, by re-creating a new vigor by means of this "purification."

794 The religious aspect of the "association" justifies such an
769 absolute, such an indisputable action. Unfortunately, we know little about it, except that certain dead are called upon by means of skulls, bones, and sacrifices, and that fertility rites are included
[831] when the Ngil has a female companion, Omore (1). [144]

1. H. Trilles, op. cit., p. 62, writes that "the new members must accomplish a number of actions connected with the act of generating before the statue of Omore . . . ," and Poupard speaks of "shameful ceremonies."

We have here a prevalent dialectic: a recourse to the social past — which is a true reservoir of endlessly accumulated powers — in order to instruct the social future and to fertilize it; the past and the future, the ancestors and the living are, like the generation of the ésa and that of the mwanö, in the relation of begetter to begotten. This movement expresses dependence and a certain social order. The intervention of the Ngil — but it is not the only

794 one – tends to re-establish this elementary order, it is a rein-
769 statement, a pledge of fertility and power. Apparently the Ngil
[171] resembles a great many other "associations" that have existed in Gabon, especially the Mwiri of the Ngounié people. (2) It con-

2. Cf. A. Maclatchy, "Organisation sociale des populations de la region de Mimongo [Social Organization of the Peoples of the Mimongo Region]," Bulletin de l'Institut d'Etudes Centrafricaines, I, I, 1945.

stitutes primarily an instrument of struggle against the sorcerers (böyêm), to the extent that they attempt to interfere with the normal order. But it is much more than that: it is the indication of a power superior to that based on kinship, a grouping with a great capacity for control (doubtless the most powerful).

794 The Fang have known other associations of men with spe-
[535] cialized functions – or rather those that create "specialists," such as the akûm, who directs the ceremonies linked with the male dance called makuma. The akûm, who appears also as a sort of chronicler-singer, intervening especially at the time of
[847] funerals and affairs concerning fertility (search for the "sorcerer" responsible for an abortion that might result in permanent sterility, (3)

3. Cf. E. Trezenem, op. cit., p. 79.

ceremonial intended to lift the incest which creates sterile marriages). The akûm in daily life is distinguished from the non-initiates by being subject to a number of special interdicts. He is a "respected, or rather a feared, person," for to him is stributed "great power." "In order to reach this situation he must have been
[535 taught by another akûm; he must have learned the interminable
671] songs that last a whole night long, and then with his own hand kill one of his close relatives...." (4) This brief description is

4. Father L. Martrou, "Les Éki

794

des Mfang [The Éki of the Fang]," Anthropos, Vol. 1, 1906.

interesting for the last point it brings up; it indicates a test, it shows above all with unquestionable brutality that all power existing outside the clan and the kinship is acquired only after making the more or less symbolic gesture of "killing the kinship." It is by the interplay of [145] such groupings that the logic of the system of kinship and of alliance by marriage is transcended.

"Associations" have a function whose import varies according to particular circumstances. They intervene to create a better cohesion between clan fragments, as is shown by the grouping of [171] initiates at the Bièri (Gabon cult) or at the Ssò (Cameroons cult known to the frontier villages); this at a time when insecurity demands a minimum of union among related villages. In other circumstances, they attempt to reinforce the inherent power of functions whose importance is affirmed: as in the case of groupings that controlled the ancient "dance of justice" (sòmana) at the time when peaceful settlement of conflicts remained the only one possible, and when the role of "peacemaker" was of primary importance. As is shown by the feminine "associations," they may also act as a curb on the domination to which a social group of inferior status is subjected. This is all the more marked as the decay of these groupings has been paralleled by the change in the relations between the sexes. We have pointed out, in connection with the Ngil, that "associations" have acted as the mechanism for higher appeal for the purpose of pacification. We must now stress the fact that some of them assume an almost permanent role of opposition to the social order.

754 776 782 Such is the case of the "association" of men known as sorcerers (pl. bŏyèm), who endeavor to acquire permanently, and in their own personal right, "wealth, strength, and power." Each one has been admitted in terms of an absolute differentiation — the possession of a "spirit" called évu(r) (s) which is physically distinguishable (1) — and with a special initiation, the latter entails the

1. Cf. H. Lavignotte, L'évur, Société

754
776
782

des Missions Evangéliques, 1947; E. Trézenem, op. cit., II, L'évur, pp. 68-74; M. Briault, op. cit., Captain Maignan, op. cit. We point out that this is a belief which is widely spread throughout South Gabon and as far as the country of the Ba-téké.

obligation to break off (more than symbolically) the ties of kinship and alliance: by the sacrifice of the first child if a woman is in question, and of the maternal uncle if it is a man.

754 776 The évur is received before birth or during the first week following birth. It transforms the organism of the individual carrying it since it can be detached at the time of an autopsy; (2)

2. It is described as follows: "It is a beast with paws, eyes, a mouth, and a tongue ... it can travel through the body ....," M. Briault, op. cit.

biologically the possessor (nnèm) and the évur are linked together; the latter "grows with the child and attains its full vitality [146] only when the child becomes an adult." Their respective powers are dependent on each other and demand sacrifices for their preservation. The bond between the two is continually shown by the play of interdicts and special obligations from which the nnèm "cannot free himself." Everything contributes to make the nnèm feel he has a different nature; even the ritual at the time of the two fundamental ceremonies celebrates the "birth" of the new nnèm and his "maturity" which permits the acts of domination. H. Lavignotte writes: "The évur lives in the body of its possessor, allowing him to split himself in two, or rather to leave his body to act in his place, to know the secrets of the other böyèm (plural of nnèm) to increase his strength tenfold, to do extraordinary things that will make him rich, to kill without leaving a trace." E. Trézenem completes this account by specifying: "Except in the case of acting for the benefit of its possessor ... the évur is always

754 harmful."
776 Thus we find asserted the use of an uncommon power for strictly personal ends: this power, called sân ngwèl, is that of the évur in action. The characteristics of domination and radical differentiation are emphasized (to the point that the possession of the évur "is indispensable to anyone wishing to be" a magician (1) ) in opposition to the system of the relationships of kinship

1. E. Trezenem, op. cit., p. 72.

(implying "fraternity" and a leveling tendency) and of alliance by marriage (implying reciprocity and co-operation). While "associations" such as the Ngil or the Akûm have a licit function, which places them in the heart of the total society, the mèm as a whole constitute a foreign grouping which is fundamentally heterogeneous and for that reason extremely dangerous. The bonds existing between bŏyèm, which become a reality at the moment of the two ceremonies of presentation and initiation, do not exclude competition, for the évur may quarrel among themselves. The quality of being a nnèm liberates the individual to a great extent. It allows him to assert himself against the established order (he can threaten those who maintain it), but it also imposes a near solitude, a state of continual aggression and defense, a dangerous existence, as is shown by the violence of collective reactions at the time of the punishment of sorcerers. (2) The symbols

2. Cf. V. Largeau, op. cit., "... when he is recognized he is burned alive or massacred and eaten."

used and the formula pronounced for the presentation of the évur indicate the hoped-for advantages (glory, wealth, and numerous progeny) but also express the indispensable qualities (virility and courage).

754 [147] These facts reveal a radical form of opposition to the clan system. They represent the most individualizing and

754 revolutionary part of Fang magic. One may see a kind of "fixation" of feelings of aggressiveness and individuality which are thwarted by the sentiments imposed by tradition (1) (the nnèm is

1. The English anthropologist G. Lienhardt analyzes the Dinka magic in "Some Notions of Witchcraft among the Dinka," Africa, Vol. 21, No. 4, October, 1951.

tolerated so long as there is no evidence of his harmful activity). One must also recognize in the nnèm a means of differentiation, an internal source of profound changes (2). The bóyèm are the

2. For the role of differentiation played by witchcraft, cf. G. Davy, La Foi Jurée [Sworn Faith], 1922. On this role and on the transformations of the social organization, "the margin of liberty," born of the conflicts between the religious clan and magic brotherhoods, cf. G. Gurvitch, La Vocation actuelle de la Sociologie [Real [or Present-day] Vocation of Sociology], ch. 7, especially pp. 412, 436, 503, 523-524.

elements that carry on the most violent and the most lasting disputes with the total society. However, the attitude of this society toward them is ambiguous. The distinction between a "good" and a "bad" évur, while both are dangerous to a normal man, proves this. They create a necessary threat.

## IV. Relations between the Sexes and the Generations, and the System of Interdicts

182 The present-day study of Fang society, as we will show in the next chapter, reveals two types of outstanding problems, those connected with the change in relations between men and women

562 (symbolized by the expression "our women have become unruly"), and those connected with the change of typical relations between generations. There is no doubt that the morphological changes affecting the groupings — splintering, mobility of individuals, abnormal sex ratio — and the process of economic development have conditioned these phenomena. Nevertheless, it is equally true that specifically Fang internal conditions explain the acuteness of the resulting problems.

562 Oral tradition is significant on the traditional relations between the sexes. According to this, woman appears to be primarily regarded in terms of her fertility: "Go find your women and populate the earth," [148] says Nzame to the first man; (1) and in terms of

1. H. Trilles, "Proverbes, Légendes et Contes Fang [Fang Proverbs, Legends, and Tales]," Legend of the Nsas, op. cit.

her usefulness: "Old woman, worn out calabash," asserts a proverb. She is shown to be subject to man ("I am nothing before a man, I am as stupid as a hen," says another proverb) and protected by him, who remains essentially "a warrior" in the ancient society. The few extant ethnographic studies have emphasized this lesser position. In his works dating from the beginning of the century, Father Trilles writes: "The girl is not considered as a "member" of the tribe." (2) E. Trezenem confirms this in a more recent account:

2. Father H. Trilles, Le totémisme chez les Fang [Totemism Among the Fang], note, p. 109.

The woman "is considered hardly more than a domestic animal..."(3)

3. Op. cit., p. 89.

At the same time, in an apparently contradictory manner, most of the early documents express surprise at the inordinate importance which seems to be placed on the woman, who is found at the source of numerous palavers, Let us add that the Fang woman was

562 shown by most observers as the principal agent of production in the midst of a slavery-free society and, for that reason, as a factor in becoming rich. These are the generally accepted opinions; what are they worth?

562 842 It appears to us that the stress falls primarily on the capacity for fecundity of the woman who is acquired legally. The wife allows the man to manifest himself as a begetter (ésa); she assures his posterity, which for a Fang is the prime property. Through her he not only proves himself fully male but he obtains a true social promotion, acquiring influence which grows in proportion to the growth of his family group, participating fully in the pre-eminent social stratum, that of the generation of "fathers." In a conquering society, as Fang society was up until recent times, a man's influence was determined more by the number of the warriors attached to him (4) (the wife properly giving him male

4. Let us quote an unequivocal proverb: "a relative is a gun."

descendants and relatives by marriage) than by his personal warlike valor. One might say his importance was in proportion to his aggressive and defensive potential.

The man without posterity is a lesser being, an inferior Fang, because he is powerless. It is significant that the word ki means at the same time "strength, virility, and power." This explains [149] the position held by the magic for fecundity, by the "techniques" to check the causes of sterility, and the fact that sterility is the sanction linked to the most serious offenses (especially incest). In a well-known formula, this state of affairs indicates the pre-eminence of the "production of human beings" over the production of means of existence." The chance discovery of a notebook in which a young man of the Oyem region had written down some of his dreams and the rules of conduct he followed has shown us the level of obsession which the pursuit after future descendents may attain.

562 842 159

We give as an example the most "direct" of these dreams: "I dream that a lady speaks to me in my dream so that my wife may have a child. I should roast a banana, go near a river, cut

562 this banana, and give half to my wife, after we have both drunk
842 some water. Then I should go and embrace my wife. Then I
159 should dip her (?) in water saying: who is this woman from whom you come?" Another text, given as a "dream," hardly deserves this name, or is only part of a richer dream (and it is still very revealing). It consists of a recipe for fecundity: "I dream that the devil recommends three herbs for a sterile woman, that she may bear a child...." The meaning is clear, all the more as various precepts collected under the title The Individual Will confirm it clearly. "I shall find means not to live any longer without leaving a child; what pursuits will permit a man not to die without leaving a child?; to choose oneself 'what is needed' to marry a woman who bears children (1) ...." One could call

1. Cahier de Daniel Ngema Ondo
[Notebook of Daniel Ngéma Ondo].

it a regular "complex of the man without posterity." The search for numerous future descendants is still the most important undertaking. If the reasons for "power" just referred to have for the moment disappeared, others have been substituted or have appeared: the fear of breaking a line of descent, of being only a "deceased one" and not an ancestor (mvam) revered by his posterity, the fear of abandoned old age, and now the desire to enrich the family grouping, which is an economic unit, by having at one's disposal the greatest possible number of active elements. Elsewhere we have pointed out that the possession of a large grouping is a guarantee of greater liberty because of the increased influence it entails.

562 Besides being the instrument for reproduction — and hence subject [150] as soon as she is married to the most complete control — the woman is also the instrument of production. While the man builds the huts, clears the plantations, and (in the past) was essentially in charge of "defending the women and children," (1)

1. In 1890, A. Fourneau observed in the Estuary region "long files of women loaded like mules" who

562 brought supplies regularly to Gabon, escorted by men with flintlock guns.

the woman is primarily a peasant. She ensures to a large extent the economy of subsistence, even taking part in hunting. With the arrival of colonization this aspect has taken on a new importance and a new direction. With the opening of increasingly more numerous markets and the established use of money, the products obtained by the woman have become a source of income, and the woman, as a worker, a source of profit. The woman became of great economic value and became, as one might say, doubly fertile. At the same time, her purely instrumental nature and her dependence became more marked. She tended to be truly an "object," all the more coveted since polygamy (in spite of the "freedom" allowed young unmarried people) makes of the woman a scarce "product". (2) The woman stands at the center of all

2. Cf. C. Levi-Strauss, Les Structures Élémentaires de la Parenté [Elementary Structures of Kinship], Paris, P.U.F., 1949.

competition at the same time that she remains the most dominated element of Fang society, because she is the one from whom most is demanded. It seems as if the woman were "separated" from the society of men, a stranger to the most organized and most active social body, and as if her impure nature is periodically asserted to better ensure her submission. This may all the better be explained because among the men the leveling tendency and the refusal to have slavery have not permitted the established existence of a relationship between one dominating and one dominated.

562 789 This situation presents some ambiguity. The "mother" has relative authority over her sons and has at her disposal the weapon of calling down curses (yogõ, to curse), by which she denies her "mother" quality. (3) In the same way, the first wife may curse

3. Cf. L. Mba, op. cit., p. 35, the text of the "Curse."

562 789 her husband. The "son-in-law" and the "mother-in-law" are bound together by a system of interdicts; the mwanõ are required [606] to show respect to the "generation of the mothers"; the pre-eminence attached to seniority plays a role in the relations between the sexes. The woman may therefore be the object of respect and the subject of fear. [151] On the other hand, "associa-562 795 tions" of women which have created a hierarchy, a teaching, a ritual of initiation, and a whole body of distinguishing symbols and signs and a technique shown by a specific dance, are referred to in various documents, particularly the Mévungõ (1), which is

1. Unpublished documents collected by Abbot A. Walker, a native of Lower Gabon and truly versed in local ethnology.

a Pahouin version of the Nyèmbé, a widely disseminated female sect in Gabon. This sect was observed by Du Chaillu about 1860 among the Ba-kélé who were for the most part subdued by the Fang. This observer wrote at that time that the Nyèmbé "protects the women from their male enemies, it avenges their grievances, and serves them in all circumstances according to their whims."(2)

2. Father du Chaillu, op. cit., p. 322 ff.

This points out with great subtlety, to the essentially compensatory role played by such a grouping. By participating in the "society of women," the woman remedies the marginal situation and the submission which are her share throughout her daily life. It imposes or necessitates her collaboration in important moments for the community and in domains which in principle are forbidden to her. [535] Thus the dance of the Mévungõ was used "long ago when a Pahouin tribe was preparing to wage war against another tribe or to make raids for women"; it was also used "at the time of preparation for great elephant hunts." (3) Such "associations" no longer survive

3. Abbot A. Walker, notes inédites [unpublished notes].

562 except in a sporadic and very degenerate form; we mention the
795 N'nup with a whole string of "queens" that has appeared in the neighboring regions of Spanish Guinea.

562 578 837 This ambiguity in the position of woman to a certain extent creates an equilibrium. On the other hand, from the point of view of sentimental relations, this is not true. The man who admits that marriage should be regulated primarily in terms of social considerations hopes to obtain some day a "favorite" wife and has little fear of sanctions connected with adultery. The woman, married young, remains prisoner of the system and is always threatened with severe sanctions. Apparently this results in the many disputes which were referred to by the first administrators. "Very often the woman abandons her husband and returns to her parents' village or follows a man of her choice..." (Archives of Libreville, 1909). They were also referred to by the first Fang scholars: "The Pahouin woman does not hesitate to leave with a lover; often married against her wishes she avenges [152] this state of things by a very great infidelity" (L. Mba, op. cit.). The expression used by this author is significant. What might be called the sentimental excuse permits a broader reaction responding to frustrations of another nature. We must see there the sign of tensions which are actualized at the only possible level. Let us add that the conditions created by colonization will liberate these tensions to a great extent by destroying the equilibrium obtained approximately by traditional means.

561 578 784 These tensions are not the only ones to be mended. Between generations, that of the ésa and that of the mwanõ, on the same segment between the eldest and the younger brothers, it appears that relationships of dependency can turn into antagonisms. Soon [551] after his birth the young boy is "marked" by his ascendants, receiving a double name (essential in relation to other denominations) which contains the name of an ancestor of his paternal line (of a mvam) and the first term of his father's name. In addition to individual interdicts imposed by his father, the child is subject to various general interdicts which are removed by degrees as the child becomes a man. Thus, there is the interdict on the pig (1), and on

1. The pig appears as a valuable animal

561
578
784

in all this part of central Africa, where the ox is unknown because of trypanosomiasis.

the produce of hunting and fishing, and these exist until the time of puberty. They signify, according to L. Martrou, that in the family group there should be "no useless mouth," ..."but rather arms and hearts capable of defending and enriching it." (2) Thus

2. L. Martrou, Les "Ékis" des Mfang [The "Ékis" of the Fang] op. cit.

[834] it is forbidden to cohabit with a woman before being circumcized (3)

3. V. Largeau, op. cit. article: Interdit [Interdict].

561 In the same way various rites mark the steps of this ascent: the
578 rite of the Ssò for the ten-year-old children; (4) circumcision,
[852
881]

4. M. Bertaut in his thesis on the Boulou of the Cameroons, a related nation, speaks of a less degraded form of the Ssò which was the center of a true "society of men" now almost vanished.

which is not accompanied by any initiation (but seems rather to bear public witness to virility and to show the individual as an active male), and above all, the "revelation" of the Biéri. When
561 the young man joins the company of men, he has experienced in
578 various degrees of intensity [153] this biological, social, and
885 spiritual dependence on his ancestors (mvam) and on his elders (nyamòrò). To them he owes his life, his security, his social existence. Even after having crossed the various steps and being able to take full part in the assembly of men, he receives from

561 them various interdicts that testify to his new state and remind
578 him of the obligation to submit to those who have made him a
885 man, a complete Fang. (1)

1. Cf. M. Briault, op. cit., pp. 183-184.

561 For a long time he submits to this superiority of his elders,
885 who intervene with the ancestors, the source of prosperity and
888 power, who permit him to fulfill and increase himself by marriage and the possession of posterity, by controlling the circulation of bride prices and women. Thus the male life curve reaches a maximum which corresponds to the social influence of the nyamòrò, decreases as old age approaches (we have already stressed the tendency in the past to discard the "grandfather," mvam), and increases infinitely after death, which gives him the quality of "ancestor" with limitless power on behalf of the living. Childhood and old age, representing the "low" points of this curve, are preparation for the two "high" states which are characterized by an increase in power and autonomy.

561 In ancient Fang society dependence guaranteed material
578 and spiritual security. It was centered on the relation between
182 the begetter (ésa) and the begotten (émò wâm) rather than on that between the dominating one and the one dominated. We have frequently stressed the leveling tendency existing in the heart of the nd'è bòt and the dangers threatening any pre-eminence acquired by personal right. The just distribution of women, wealth, and tasks is expected from the "eldest," not any domination. In another respect, during the period of conquest, attempts at domination and the establishment of excessive personal power were limited by the important role of the "warrior" (who best incarnates the qualities which caused Dr. Cureau to compare the Fang to "modern Spartans") and the threats of rupture in the heart of a grouping which needed to remain sufficiently large and coherent. An equilibrium may arise between the power of the "eldest ones" (religious and political pre-eminence) and the power of the young men (martial pre-eminence). It involves particularly the rigid regulation of the circulation of the women, the possibility for these

561 young men to go beyond the level of simple dependence to be-
578 come, in their turn, creators of dependence, and the possibility
182 [154] of "capitalizing" human lives (women and descendants). This equilibrium has been upset and competition disorganized by the passage from warlike to economic conquest, then to an agricultural economy in which the woman plays a fundamental part, and the pacification which no longer permits the lack of women to be remedied by raids. Capitalization of women and capitalization of property are then bound together, the former becoming to a great extent the condition of the latter. The role of the "rich" man (nkumakuma) is increasing: (1) relations be-

> 1. To such an extent that Bertaut notes that among the Cameroons Boulou, who have been longer subject to a modern economy, there is only one word nkuma to designate the chief of village groupings.

tween generations, between "eldest sons", and "younger sons," may become that between possessors (women, property, and political role) and nonpossessors. Dependence tends to take on the characteristics of a domination creating tensions and conflicts.

784 626 We have been able to define a certain number of points of equilibrium in the heart of ancient Fang society. We must now specify the important position held by the system of interdicts (biki) in social control. According to M. Briault the word éki (plural, biki) comes from the root ki meaning "force, restraint, virility, power"; it expresses a ritual prohibition, an interdict or taboo; it designates "a person or thing marked with a sacred character with whom or with which contact or use are forbidden." This author considers the éki essentially from the point of view of the restraint they exercise and of the social order which they help to maintain. He writes: "They give rather the idea of an effective means of keeping youth, women ... in short, all in the society who are made to obey, in a spirit of subjection to those whose will is of importance ... political interest is doubled and made

788
626
valid by a supernatural appearance." (2) L. Mba presents them

2. M. Briault, op. cit., p. 183 ff.

as rules of conduct whose observance the Pahouin have imposed upon themselves in matters of personal behavior, of good manners and tact, or regulations concerning marriage, religion, medicine, witchcraft, and morals." (3) He refers to their extension to the

3. The "E-Tchi," unpublished study added to the reports of the Commission of Historical investigation.

whole society, their character of categorical imperative, and the power of their hold. The classification he attempts to make and that given by L. Martrou (4) suggest a distinction between

4. Father L. Martrou, "Les 'Ékis' des Mfang [The 'Ékis' of the Fang]," op. cit.

collective biki: the general ones (concerning "morality" or those of sex, age group, and "association"; and the personal biki: applying to state, or fortuitous [sic] ones. By referring to the "guardians" charged with maintaining or [155] imposing the eki – male relatives are charged with imposing them on children, the husband on the wife, the old men on the young ones – Léon Mba points out the importance of interdicts in maintaining and strengthening social pre-eminences. In the same sense, L. Martrou notes the numerous éki imposed on the wife and placing her "in an inferior position." The éki appears to be a rudimentary means of regulation expressed without specific justification, that asserts the pre-eminence of the agent in charge of maintaining it or "granting" it, and the violation of which brings about more or less keen reactions according to the nature of the authority involved (going from simple disapproval to the sacrifice of reparation). He points out particularly the form that law can assume in

784-626 a society without specialized institutions, in a society which must have recourse to material signs in default of written signs which can express any law in a permanent manner. It should be noted, as suggested by the Fang vocabulary, that the same word, biki, designates the "money" used in the past for matrimonial exchanges as well as the "interdicts." The regulation of the circulation of wives was perhaps the origin of the system of éki and was the first and most important of these regulations. There is perhaps additional proof there for the authors who consider the "taboo of incest" as a constituent element of so-called primitive societies.

If the éki system contributes to the protection of the social order and the pre-eminences it implies, it is also the creator of a right for those it subjects. The latter must respect the éki affecting them, but they insist that this obligation be respected by others. (1) In this double sense the role of "giver of éki" is

1. Thus the husband is required in an imperative manner to respect the éki of each of his wives. Information in the study Le Mariage Fang [Fang Marriage], Archives of Oyem.

important, indicating a pre-eminence and a vague form of individual right. In his study L. Martrou has given a privileged place to the éki of [personal] "circumstance" and of "social condition." The éki make conspicuous the important moments of the life of the individual (thus the multiple "interdicts" connected with pregnancy), of the collective life (periods of preparation for war or for hunting, for example), and also of special situations (the members of the "associations" have special éki for each one). There is here an important function of differentiation which marks their minds and multiplies their distinctive behavior. The n'nèm is given some éki at the same time as the évur which makes him a "sorcerer." Because of these he feels himself to be radically [156] apart to the point of linking his physical existence to the strict respect of the éki. Mr. Trezenem mentions specific cases when the involuntary transgression of a certain éki resulted

784
626 in almost immediate death (without any other intervention). (1)

1. Op. cit., pp. 70-71.

The content of the éki, which may be almost insignificant or specifically symbolic, is often less important than the fact of giving and receiving the éki. The éki has authority: that of the ancestors who have bequeathed the "tradition," (2) that of an

2. The Fangs have a word eyêm (plural, biyêm) to designate individual or collective manners of being.

ancestor who has expressed himself in a dream, that of the practicing magician, that of the father, or that of the assembly of the full-grown men, etc. It aims at an effectiveness by affirming a new circumstance of the person and of the social condition. In the case of "interdicts" that are automatically connected with certain illnesses, the objectives of differentiation and therapy are very definite.

The éki do not constitute a closed, untouchable system. They are indicative of the life itself of the total society, proliferating or falling into disuse according to circumstances. L. Mba specifies that the contact of the Fang with other people of Gabon has caused the éki to evolve "toward becoming mixed and multiple." This remark is important because it shows how the éki have been used for the policy of assimilation and power of the contacting Fang groups. It also shows how much the éki tend to adapt themselves to new conditions. In addition this "multiplicity" is allied to a great extent to the factors of differentiation operating outside the clan structure. L. Mba shows the "interdicts" not only as a "certain code of morals" but also as "the secret and atavistic resource of the Pahouin soul." He thus stresses their role in the formation of a sort of "national character" and the essential values that they may promote and defend.

5: Balandier--109 E-5 (1946-1951) 1955 FH9 Fang FH9

## V. First Reactions to Material Inferiority

556 441 The access of the Fang to the traditional trade regions has had great consequences. What started out as a conquering and "colonizing" undertaking has imperceptibly changed into a search for manufactured "riches" (bium) and [157] competition for trade routes and trade centers. The quest for "merchandise" is the primary male activity and sets in motion the machinery of war and witchcraft.

829 773 The legends which we know stress the attraction of the West as the country of white men who have all riches at their disposal. One of these told by V. Largeau suggests the importance of access to these trade zones:

"We arrive at last at the N'Tem and the Ogooué where we meet those who distribute riches ... they give us everything, we become rich." (1)

1. Op. cit., article: Instruction.

The legendary texts collected by Father Trilles under the title "Noirs et Blancs [The Blacks and the Whites]" are particularly significant. A predominant place is given to the theme of wealth, held only by the white men. Wealth has escaped the black men — because of a lack of technique and because of an attitude of abandoning rather than dominating the world, (2) or

2. "Proverbes, Légendes et Contes Fang [Fang Proverbs, Legends, and Tales]," op. cit., and especially "Noirs et Blancs [Blacks and Whites]" and "Légende du Nsas [Legend of the Nsas]."

has been stolen from them. (3) The whites apparently represent

3. "Legend of Bingo"; and "in order to seize his treasures (from the hero

829
773

Bingo) and possess his secret, they killed him and took the green stone, the green stone he would have left us. Since then men from beyond the mountains possess the riches of the earth, but we have kept the laws of Bingo...."

wealth, they are mitâgō, those who count. They have even been proclaimed by mythology. They have the physical appearance of ghosts, and they have at their disposal all the goods accumulated in the country of the ancestors. One can see therefore the powerful impression made by the arrival of the white man who was rich in merchandise, and the value, reinforced by the whole meaning of the myth, placed on this wealth. At the time of the clan regrouping movement, certain teachings in the form of question and answer continued to associate the two terms, power of the white man's example and pursuit of riches:

"--What life should we lead?
--We should lead the European life.
--What is the example we should give to lead the European life?
--We should work in order to earn money...." (4)

4. Cahier des réunions [Notebook of Gatherings], Yémisèm of Oyem.

441
167 At the beginning of this chapter we stressed the attraction of the economically strong centers -- the coast, the Lower Ogooué, Spanish Guinea. A map of the migrations makes [158] them appear like meeting points. At first the Fang settled in the outskirts of these centers or attracted the trading stations to themselves with a feeling of real appropriation. Du Chaillu and Cureau observed this phenomenon, the former by showing how "having become the white man of such-and-such a chief, " he "obtained well-being and security" but was obliged to give

441 presents." (1) The latter analyzed the Ogooué commerce which was

1. Voyages et Aventures dans l'Afrique Equatoriale [Travels and Adventures in Equatorial Africa], pp. 106 and 120.

"under the thumb of the Fang population": "Firms were obliged to maintain their establishments in definite localities and were forbidden under threat of hostilities to move them upstream. The European agent was respected; far from being disturbed, their stores were strictly protected by the village warriors. The merchant was a prisoner of the population; he found himself invested with a monopoly." (2)

2. Op. cit., pp. 294-295.

441 556 829 The first government reports continue to note, like Du Chaillu, the desire of each large grouping to have a trading post for itself; once satisfied they would relax and be submissive."(3)

3. Rapport annuel de 1907 [Annual Report of 1907], Archives of Gabon.

This behavior is not explained by the single economic anxiety to reserve for themselves a monopoly and to have at hand the possibility of bartering. To have a trading station in contact with the village itself is to have reached the end of migrations westward which were to lead to the source of wealth; it is to participate constantly in this wealth and to have the certainty of a superior life. To enter into relations with the white man, who appears both as an "eldest son" and more than a human being with his riches and knowledge of riches, this is to participate in a circuit of power and fecundity, and to transcend a somehow cursed existence in order to attain the "true life."

829 773 On the other hand, the legends show how, in contact with technical manifestations and European enterprise, the Fang very

829 soon developed a feeling of subjection and inferiority in wisdom
773 and riches. This is attributed to a decision of Nzamõ (God), to a veritable curse. A text collected by Largeau mentions two children of Nazmõ — Ekouagha (subjected) and Ndan'gho (ruler) — and the wishes expressed for each of these:

For Ndan'gho, the father says: "Riches! authority! wisdom!" [159] He adds: "All these things are in yourself!" Again he says: "You will beget white children." For Ekouagha, he cries out: "Alas! my other son has taken everything with the fortune ... There are no riches left for you ... you will beget black men ... you will be miserable..." (1) This is a theme comparable to that

1. Op. cit., article, Instruction.

of the "Legend of the Nsas" given by Father Trilles, in which Nazmõ [sic] ends by saying: "You, black man, rise and go and find your wives and populate the earth ... you will always remain naked as now ... You, white man, you will be rich, richer even than you were in your dream. You, the white man, will always be the white man, the black man will always be the black man, the white man will always be rich, the black man always poor..." (2)

2. Op. cit., Légende du Nsas [Legend of Nsas].

829 The curse motif indicates the effective potentialities attached
773 to imported riches and their acquisition. Also there appears per-
177 haps the first awareness of the racial question and above all a technical insufficiency allied to a social organization that is wholly preoccupied with the production of human beings, (in the legend quoted, "go and find your wives and populate the earth" is part of the curse). The illusion of direct participation in riches was quickly destroyed, and the ascendancy of the agents of colonization became more specific and more complete. The theme of the curse attached to the race shows the extent of the deception. It is no longer possible to return to methods of violence. Witchcraft techniques then increase in number; recourse is had to knowledge revealed during fits brought on by the absorption of certain forms

829 of strychnine, and the idea, borrowed from Christianity, of a
773 better life after death becomes more specific. The effort at
177 adaptation dealt first with religious and magical techniques; in these fields much was borrowed from neighboring peoples (for example, the Bwiti cult of which we will speak later); customs are altered not in order to assimilate for purposes of conquest but simply for means of defense. The Fang people, reduced to a state of unemployed conquerors, lose the essential part of their moral strength. As we will show in the next chapter the Fang are one of those peoples that have most keenly suffered from crises due to the colonial situation and one of those that have reacted most to this threat.